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THE UNIVERISTY OF ALBERTA

STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS
OF THE
ALBERTA DIPLOMA EXAMINATIONS

BY

(C) ADRIANE EARTHA LENORA DORRINGTON

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE

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DEPARTMENT OF SECONDARY EDUCATION

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FALL 1986

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The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis entitled Students' Perceptions of Alberta Diploma Examinations submitted by Adriane E.L. Dorrington in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Education.

Wallis Lamirande
(Supervisor)

Don Mazey

K B Jacknicke

Date: Aug 5, 1986

Dedicated to my mother and father whose constant love and belief were my source of inspiration. And to my brothers and sisters who always knew I could do it.

Abstract

This study focused on the perceptions six Biology 30 students had regarding the Alberta Biology 30 diploma exam. The students discussed the perceived impact the diploma exams were having on teachers, students, mode of teaching, and school life in general. The participants were all biology 30 students attending one of the large urban high schools in Edmonton. All of the students, who had no prior experience writing Alberta diploma exams, were slated to write the June 1984 Biology 30 exam.

The students assigned took part in three discussion sessions held prior to the June writing date. The last two sessions were termed validation sessions whereby the students were given opportunities not only to clarify, analyze, and modify their earlier comments but also my thematic analysis of earlier sessions.

Two discussion sessions were held after the June writing date. The first was to gain students' perceptions of the diploma exams, as written. Only one validation session could be scheduled because of time constraints.

After transcribing the tapes, six major themes were identified; power vs powerless, tests, impact of diploma exam, atmosphere, diploma exam, and actual

preparation for the exam. The first three themes evolved out of transcripts taken prior to the writng of June 1984 Biology 30 diploma exam. The remaining themes evolved out of transcripts taken after writing the Biology 30 diploma exam. Each major theme was analyzed in terms of associated sub-themes.

This study indicated that many of the students' negative comments resulted from lack of communication between teachers and students concerning diploma exams. The teachers must help students gain an understanding for the rationale of tests and testing.

Also, it was noted that many students held certain beliefs regarding the relationship that seemed to exist between multiple choice exams and science exams. A major concern for the students was whether multiple exams could adequately test their knowledge. Though there was much stated support for essay style tests, their inexperience and lack of confidence in writing such tests only reinforced their preference for multiple choice tests.

The study showed that the readability of certain multiple choice questions, especiallly the longer questions, was found to be confusing by many of the students. Many students claimed that the associated

tables and charts usually made questions more difficult to understand.

Perhaps, the most basic students' concern that evolved out of the study is whether knowledge can ever be accurately measured by tests regardless of format.

Preface

During my formal educational years, I had a steady diet of standardized tests. I can vividly recall writing my first standardized test when I was six years old. I can still remember all of the formalities. The test was printed on long white paper and was placed face down on the desk with the teacher repeating to each student, "Do not touch until you are told to do so!" Staring at it, for what seemed like hours, I noticed that the booklet was perforated and stapled together and there was a sticker sealing the booklet closed. We all sat there with two sharpened pencils ready to go! Strangely enough, I can't seem to recall any of the test items or even the format. In retrospect, that episode served to prepare me for the many standardized tests that were to follow.

Over the past 20 years, I have written comprehension, achievement, aptitude, MCAT's, GMAT's, I.Q. and SACU tests. The list and abbreviations could go on. However, the only standardized test that cannot be added to the roster was the Nova Scotia Provincial

Exams. I was a student of the late 60's and 70's and the school curricula and testing philosphies were undergoing massive changes. The grade 10 & 11 provincial exams were abolished the years in which I was entering those grades. They became optional in my grade 12 year. Out of a graduating class of 120 students, five students wrote the exams. Two of whom, were coerced into writing in order to achieve a high provincial rating for our school.

I can vividly remember teachers teaching for the provincials. My grade 12 teachers would use the old provincial exams starting in May, to prepare students for the June writing date. The drilling period was so intensive that I can still visualize the format of those exams.

With recent implementation of provincial exams in Alberta, an opportunity existed for me to research the effect these exams had on some of the students. I hope that this study will bring me to a closer understanding of what it was like for those students to prepare and write diploma exams and how they perceive the effects that these exams have on teachers, curricula, mode of teaching and school life in general.

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Dr. Ken Jacknicke through his insightful comments, raised many questions that added to this study. His input was much appreciated.

Dr. Don Massey provided many probing questions. His comments and suggestions were most welcomed.

To my friends who provided moral support when I needed it most.

And finally, to the teacher and the six students for without their co-operation none of this would have been possible.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

An Historical Account

Tests can be traced back to the ancient Greeks during which time testing became a well established, refined process. The Spartans, a culture devoted to physical cultivation, provided a series of pre-determined tests which young boys, by using specific skills, had to pass in order to receive official manhood status. Socrates emphasized the importance of intelligence rather than achievement and established methods that were used to test one's intellect. During this era, the teacher and student were constantly testing each other's intelligence (Chauncey and Dobbin, 1963).

As time passed, the structure of the school and the role of the teacher and student became more defined. By the late 1800's, schools had become a very formal institution with teachers as schoolmasters and students as submissive learners (Pulliam, 1982). Chauncey and Dobbin (1963) reported that the first documented steps towards standardized testing used in the public school

system was introduced by Horace Mann in 1845 in Boston. Prior to this, the Boston Public School System had an established "School Committeemen" that orally examined students. Mann substituted a uniform written examination in place of the oral examinations and in support of the change publicly acknowledged the following:

1. These examinations are impartial, and there is no possibility of favoritism or "officious interference" by the examiner.
2. Uniform questions eliminate the chance element inherent in oral examinations, where questions vary so widely that the good pupil may miss a hard question while the dullard answers an easy one correctly.
3. Such examinations conserve the time of the examiners and permit many questions to be asked of all the pupils--the greater the number of questions, the nearer does the examination approach completeness.
4. Uniform examinations place all the students under the same conditions--they all run the same race over the same course. (Chauncey and Dobbin, p. 11)

The basic underlying concept was that students would be able to demonstrate their knowledge by answering a large number of required quesions. Dr. J. M. Rice in 1897, was the first to use a standardized test to resolve an educational problem regarding classroom methodology. He served to prepare the way for other early American test-developers such as Thorndike, Stone, Courtis, Ayres, and Hillegas (Buros, 1961).

Jensen (1981) reported that, in Europe during the late 1800's, Alfred Binet a French psychologist, was involved in trying to resolve a perceived educational dilemma. A segment of the European society had expressed concern for the welfare of the brighter students. They perceived that these students were being held back because the slow/dull students in the class required most of the teacher's time. It was assumed that both groups would benefit if the slower students were put in classes by themselves. The dilemma was that no one had yet devised a method that could reliably identify these "slow, dull" students. Many European psychologists had tried to use differences in physical characteristics and psychomotor skills as a means for separation. However, this proved to be very unsuccessful. Binet in 1904, had proposed that by observing a child's ability to perform

pre-determined daily tasks, it was possible to judge their brightness. Binet's tests were quickly adopted by Western society. However, many people overlooked the fact that brightness (intelligence) was being measured indirectly. After some modification by Dr. Lewis Terman of Stanford University, America received her first standardized "intelligence test" the Stanford Binet in 1916.

America's participation in World War I helped to popularize standardized testing. It soon became widely recognized and generally accepted throughout the Western world. The American Armed Forces had two established standardized tests, the Army Alpha Test for literates and the Army Beta Test for illiterates. Over two million enlisted personnel were administered the tests. The candidates' scores were then correlated to the vast array of military assignments. The Armed Forces had previously reported that candidates who were arbitrarily assigned showed a very poor success rate. It was felt that this correlated method would yield a much higher success rate. A pre-established scale was used by the Armed Forces to measure success. High scoring candidates were placed in positions that were perceived to require a higher degree of expertise and responsibility.

Consequently, low scoring candidates were posted in areas that were perceived to require little expertise and almost no responsibility (Strenio Jr., 1981).

During the 1920's and 30's, reliability and validity became major concerns to test developers, such as Thorndike, Terman, Kelley and Ruch (Lipsitz, 1976). They attempted to fine-tune their measuring instruments by refining ideas, approaches and running experimental studies. Test developing was still considered to be a relatively new field of study. Meanwhile, Goddard, Brigham, Thorndike and Turmin and others, were using tests' results to degrade, isolate, exclude or promote certain ethnic groups (Lipsitz, 1976). Many well known test developers were closely affiliated with, or members of, the growing eugenic movement. This movement strongly supported the belief that certain ethnic groups were intellectually inferior. They felt that this belief was supported by the low scores that these groups achieved on many of the standardized tests. Still, others were questioning the whole concept of standardization and its possible uses and abuses. Standardized testing was becoming firmly entrenched in the educational system in spite of the discord. It was seen as being a very effective means of assessing a student's knowledge. Many

well established educational institutions not only publicly supported standardized tesing but also financed and conducted research in other testing laboratories.

By the time America entered World War II, the Army Alpha and Army Beta tests had been refined. At that time over 12 million military personnel wrote the tests. Even after refining the originaltests, test developers were concerned that despite their efforts a poor correlation still existed between the "success" of the candidate, as defined by the Army, and the test results. Yet, all military personnel were required to write another test immediately following the war. The purpose of this particular test was to determine where these veterans would best serve society.

Throughout the entire historical development of standardized tests, many supporters claimed that such tests were justified because using them was done in the name of science and they were perceived as being "scientifically constructed."

Due to the obsesssion that people appear to have for standardized tests, there has been a rapid proliferation of these tests within the last sixty years. There have been tests developed to measure almost very conceivable characteristic of man. It has been

estimated that 90% of all American adults have taken at least one standardized test (Pulliam, 1982). In 1960, the actual cost of standardized testing was estimated to range between $200 and $300 million a year (Strenio Jr., 1981). This conservative estimate did not include the sales of preparatory material, the hours spent being coached by an expert nor the cost of the test administrators.

The Albertan Scenario

"Mr. Speaker, as Minister of Education I would like to announce beginning in September of 1983, all Grade 12 students in Alberta will be required to write provincial examinations in order toreceive a high school diploma." (Honourable Dave King - refer to Appendix 2 for the entire text.) These exams were being reinstated after an 11 year dormant period. Mr. King within his statement, alluded to the fact that this direction was necessary in order to develop and maintain a standard of education excellence throughout the province of Alberta. Mr King indicated that his new direction "is important in order to develop and maintain excellence." Two questions immediately arise out of this "What is meant by excellence?" and "How is excellence measured?"

Examinations are usually considered to be an evaluative or an assessment instrument. An assessment can only occur whenever one person, in some kind of interaction, direct or indirect, with another, is conscious of obtaining and interpreting information about the knowledge and understanding, or the abilities and attitudes, of that other person. Therefore an assessement can be viewed as a human encounter and is not possible without human interaction (Frith 1984).

It is not only important to know the purpose behind the assessment but to be able to identify the group or groups that will benefit from the assesment. Pidgeon and Yates (1968) reported that assessments should serve the following five purposes: 1. diagnosis - of pupils' strengths and weaknesses; 2. evaluation - of the effectiveness of methods of teaching; 3. assessment - of the extent to which the pupils have benefitted from a course of instruction; 4. prediction - of pupils' future performance; and 5. placement- of pupils in the most beneficial educational situation. Pidegon and Yates proclaimed that the first two purposes were student oriented.

As a result, students should benefit from diagnostic and evaluative forms of assessment. They

concluded that the last three purposes were of more benefit to teachers than students. Are these purposes realized in the implementaion of the Alberta diploma exams?

After looking at some of the reasons why we assess in education, we need to consider who will benefit from the assessment provided by the Alberta provincial examinations. Is it teachers, other educators, parents, future employers, and/or the pupil? This area was not clearly defined in the ministerial statement.

Another seemingly contentious element is the grade or mark. Marks convey different meanings to people depending upon the circumstances. A mark of 80 on a test seldoms receives the same consideration as an 80 on a final exam. One contributing factor is that most people have been conditioned by the educational system to expect exams to be more arduous than tests. Often tests will focus upon one specific area whereas exams assess several specific areas. The importance we attach to certain subjects will also affect how the mark is interpreted. A person who attributes a higher value to the applied sciences may not place much value on a 90 in a social science course such as history. What does that mark of 90 indicate? Does that mark of 90 indicate the student

knows 90% of the work or 90% of the work that was tested? Is the mark representative of a formative assessment? The purpose of a formative assessment is to determine how effective a particular program has been taught to a group of students. This type of assessment enables the teacher to diagnose any problematic areas and to modify these areas so that the students can better learn. Or is the mark reflective of a summative or terminal assessment? A student is assessed at the end of a course and the mark symbolizes his achievement level in that course. Regardless of the situation, various interpretations can be attributed to an examination score. There are other variables that must be considered such as individual students, teachers' effectiveness, school environments, and testing environments.

However, the complexity of the situation didn't seem to impede government officials from denouncing the educational system based upon the diploma results. A headline in the Edmonton Journal February 29, 1984 read "Exam Results Show School Deficiencies" (Appendix 3). The Minister of Education was quoted as saying "clearly they (the marks) show inadequacies in the educational system." The article reported that the results of Biology 30, Math 30 and Physics 30 were boosted 1.9 to

4.7 percent because the students "didn't do as well as expected." The irony seemed to lie in the fact that these averages were manipulated so that they would eventually coincide with the pre-determined expectations which were established by the government. The media seemed to call attention to the low scores without attempting to interpret the meaning of the scores. There were several possible interpretations that could have accounted for the low marks such as a first time experience for many of the students, nervousness and anxiety as expressed by the students, and unfamiliarity with testing procedures. The article failed to mention any of these possibilities rather it implied that the low marks were synonymous with a declining educational system.

These exams have already started to have an impact on the curriculum. Some teachers have indicated that they will give more attention (stress) to topics which are explicitly stated in the curriculum guidelines. The reason given by many teachers is that the diploma exams cannot test topics which are optional. As one teacher commented "Why teach something that the students won't receive credit for? Everyone seems to be interested in only the marks." It would also appear that

teachers are starting to teach for the exam. The number of teachers requesting Alberta Education Biology 30 unit tests soared rapidly between February and May 1984.

The unit tests are used to field test teacher prepared questions. The unit tests are topic specific as outlined in the curriculum guidelines. The format usually consist of 40 multiple choice questions and two or three short answer essays. Prior to January 1984 Biology 30 diploma exam, the Student Evaluation department had to request help from a small number of teachers scattered throughout Alberta. These teachers would voluntarily give the tests to their students. Immediately after writing the tests all tests booklets and answer sheets would be returned to Alberta Education. Next the tests were scored, the resulting statistics from each question would determine whether the question could be used on a diploma exam or needed to be modified and field tested again or discarded. After the January 1984 diploma exam was written, there was a sudden increase in the number of teachers requesting unit tests. However, the demand could not be met even though there was an increase in the production of unit tests.

During my school visitations in May and June, several teachers were constantly observed carrying copies

of the January 1984 diploma exams. They seemed to modify their lessons and questions according to the information and questions contained in the diploma exam booklet. This observation was later noted by several of the participants.

Acknowledging that the following excerpt was taken from a 1888 educational report, Madaus cites its present day relevancy: "In the very nature of things, the coming examination with such consequences must largely determine the character of prior teaching and study. Few teachers can resist such an influence, and in spite of it, teach according to their better knowledge and judgment. They cannot feel free, if they would... They shut their eyes to the needs of the pupils and put their strength into what will "count" in the examination" (Madaus, 1985, p.617). Many of the requested unit tests were being used for intensive classroom drills. One such case was reported in the Edmonton Journal January 24, 1984. It reported that an English 33 student found her diploma essay exam easy because they had "practised" writing essays for two weeks, maybe even a month prior to the diploma exam.

Implicit within these mandated tests is a belief that test performance is synonymous with the quality of

education. As more students pass these tests, the test and policy makers will claim: 1) to have stengthened an already weakened educational system, 2) that they are producing higher quality students ready to face the demands of our society, and 3) to have standardized education. But what constitutes quality education and quality students and who determines educational quidelines - government; educators; and/or society? This concept of quality control is embedded within our technocratic society. As a further extrapolation of this concept, the school could be viewed as a factory; the teachers as workers; the students as products; the public and prospective employers as consumers. Is this what education is all about? If we continue to focus solely on educational test scores, we will soon lose the holistic image of education. In summary, education is composed of many elements and any one element cannot be expected to represent the totality of education.

The purpose of the study is outlined in Chapter 2. Also in conjunction with this, I have elaborated on the perceived significance of the study. A brief synopsis of the methodological approach employed in this research study has been outlined. A further detailed expansion of the methodology is provided in Chapter 4.

The delimitations of this study are listed in Chapter 2. Chapter 3 focuses solely upon a review of the relevant literature. It provides a supporting framework for the study. An interpretative analysis of the data is dealt with in Chapter 4. In the concluding Chapter 5, I have examined the perceived problematic areas arising out of the study and have proposed alternate suggestions which many be used in future similar studies.

CHAPTER II

EXPLANATION OF THE STUDY

Overview

This chapter commences by focusing on the rationale for the study. Within the rationale, I have outlined my intent, purpose of the study, and have discussed to some degree the statement of problem.

The next section profiles methodology. I have attempted to address the major methodological concerns that are often associated with qualitative studies: subjectivity, reliability, and validity.

The following section pertains to the procedures used to select the participants, and the location of the study. Also, a list of assumptions and delimitations that were related to the study have been outlined in this section.

The last section focuses on the significance of the study. In that section, I have indicated how my study came to be and why I perceived it to be of great importance. I have concluded the chapter by examining several educational areas that I hope this study may one day influence.

Rationale for the Study

This study evolved out of my association with the Alberta Student Evaluation Branch. While employed there, I read many governmental reports predicting the many positive effects that the diploma exams would have on teachers, students, and quality of education - many of which were debatable. Nevertheless, within a few months noticeable changes could be observed. The Evaluation Branch could not meet the increased demand for unit test by teachers. While in schools, much emphasis was now being placed on diploma examination preparation by teachers and students. Regardless of the teachers' stance towards the governmental exams, most teachers felt obligated to ensure that their students would be adequately prepared to write the diploma examination.

By far the largest group most affected by the implementation of the departmentals were the students. They were both the subject and object of the diploma examination issue. I perceived them as being the silent majority. They had no avenue by which they could voice their concerns. The students had to write the diploma exams regardless of their opinions. It was at this point, that my study was conceived. My intentions were

to critically analyze the nature or essence of "what it is to be a student confronting the diploma exams for the first time." In conjunction to this basic intent, I had hoped that the students would relate their perceived impact the diploma exams were having on teachers, modes of teaching, curriculum and school life in general. I sensed that it was not enough to analyze the situation but to reconstruct and interpret it, so that people outside of this student culture would be able to understand with acute sensitivity, a situation confronted by many students.

Perhaps it would be worthwhile if we were to pause momentarily and consider this sub-cultural group of high school students. Many of us at onetime belonged to this sub-culture. As a seemingly identifiable group, we mechanistically responded to many of the teachers requests. There were tacit rules that students were expected to follow. A student was there to learn from the teacher, receive a good education, and eventually secure a good job. Such expectations and other more explicitly stated demands by parents, teachers, and society often were responsible for the alienation displayed by students. Commonalities such as perceived alienation from the rest of society, promoted

commraderie among students. In reality "freedom to create, and to construct, to wonder, and to venture" often did not exist for this sub- culture (Freire 1983, p.55). Attempts to question the teachers were sometimes perceived as acts of defiance. Students were often misunderstood perhaps because few outside of the sub-culture took time to understand what students were "really" saying. After being a member for a period of time, we passed into another sub-cultural setting leaving that one behind. But with this rite of passage, many of us shelved this phase of our life away. The deficiences, limitations, misunderstandings, and other associated complexities that were specifiable to us as students faded into oblivion along with our transposition into another sub-culture. Recognizing that with this rite of passage a person can never return to this sub-cultural setting, a deeper meaning and understanding of this group could only evolve through a hermeneutic endeavor. I have attempted in this study, to search out meanings and understandings a group of students have developed in regards to the diploma exams. Premised on Suransky's model, I have attempted "to render them visible to those in power by giving them sensible actuality" (Suransky 1982, p.28).

Methodology

As originally mentioned, my study had a hermeneutic orientation. My quest was to seek an interpretive understanding of "what it is to be a student confronting the diploma exams for the first time." I saw myself as a "stranger" attempting to interpret the sub-cultural aspects of several high school students. Recognizing my ineligibility to re-enter into this sub-culture, I had to explore alternate ways by which I could establish a relationship with this group. I sought to establish a methodology that would focus on understanding and human meaning rather than emphasizing prediction and universal laws which are premised in the scientific paradigm. "Understanding comes from trying to put oneself in the other person's shoes from trying to discern how others think, act, and feel" (Patton 1975, p.26). As reported by Patton (1975), John Lofland explains that methodologically this means:

1. getting close to the people being studied through attention to the minutia of daily life, through physical proximity over a period of time, and through development

of closeness in the social sense of intimacy and confidentiality;

2. being truthful and factual about what is observed;
3. emphasizing a significant amount of pure description of action, people, activities, etc; and
4. including as data direct quotations from participants as they speak and/or from whatever they may write. "The commitment to get close, to be factual, descriptive, and quotive constitutes a significant commitment to represent the participants in their own terms." (Patton 1975, p.27)

Recognizing this to be my task, any usage of preconceived notions, assumptions, and/or categorization would violate the findings. In an attempt to develop this sense of closeness with the participants while working within a self-imposed time frame, I chose to construct an informal, personalized atmosphere. The discussion sessions though informal, did not allow for amnonymity because all of the participants were present at every session. Within this environment, I would be able to interview and discuss with the participants their

analysis and perceptions of the diploma exams in a relaxed setting. The transcripts from the taped conversations would constitute my data.

After having established that this would be a qualitative research, it became necessary to address any concerns that might arise regarding objectivity, subjectivity, reliability, and validity. Historically, objectivity has always been a requirement in the scientific method. The implication was that the resulting scientific knowledge would be devoid of biases and would be value free. Given the overall dominance of the scientific method in quantitative research studies, much prominence was paid to objectivity. Consequently, subjectivity which was associated with qualitative research was often regarded as biased, unreliable, and non rational. In order to achieve a certain degree of acceptability with this type of research, one was often encouraged to adopt an objective approach and deal with the facts as presented. However, facts did not organize themeselves into concepts and theories by mere observation. Questions had to asked before answers could be found. These questions were symbolic of a person's interest or values in their given world (Myrdal, 1969). Nevertheless, objectivity in the conventional or

scientific sense led to establishing universal laws and making predictions regarding social phenomena but fell short of enabling one to understand these social phenomena. The subjective approach not only permitted but encouraged the researcher to become involved with the data. Rather than arriving at a highly quantified, technocratic, empiricistic view of a social phenomenon, the subjective approach provided the researcher an opportunity to experience his own existence as it inter-relates with social phenomenon. The minds and feelings of the human being were brought back into the centre of research "...a centre that has thus far been dominated by techniques and rules" (Patton, 1975, p.23).

Social science or qualitative research studies so often associated with subjectivity can also strive for objectivity. In order to achieve objectivity, it becomes necessary to expose one's valuations or beliefs to full light, make them conscious, specific and explicit and permit to form the strategic framework for the study (Myrdal, 1969).

Reliability and Validity

Another component that was often stressed in scientific research was reliablity. The reliability of a study refers to its stability, consistency, and replicability of its scientific findings. The three areas of particular concerns are; the consistency of a test from one time to another; the consistency of test items or content; and, the consistency of scoring among different observers or raters (Moore 1983). This obsession with reliability prompted Irwin Deutscher to state "...We concentrate on consistency without much concern with what it is we are being consistent about or whether we are consistently right or wrong." (Patton, 1975, p.19). Given the nature of qualitative studies, reliability as it relates to stability, consistency and replicability is often more nebulous. It is the understanding of human endeavours in given situations that is of paramount importance in such studies and not the need to predict, generalize, or to replicate findings.

Validity focuses on meaning and meaningfulness of the data - does a test measure what it claims to measure (Moore, 1983, p.206). In a scientific paradigm,

valid findings must be verifiable to all competent observers. As reported by Carson (1984), this is normally accomplished by empirical references which will substantiate the findings. Validity functions differently in a qualitative paradigm. According to Gadamer, there exists no priviledged externalized way of mediating validity (Carson, 1984, p.72). Validity focuses on the meaning of the scientist's observation and data with special emphasis on its meaning for the participants in a qualitative study. The test of validity of the findings remains valid in terms of the participants. It is the participants and not the researcher who determines validity. However, in hermeneutic interpretative studies, meaning and understanding can only evolve through interaction of both the researcher and participants.

Reliability and validity both have a role to play in qualitative and quantitative studies. The emphasis between the two will be dependent upon the paradigmatic approach being employed in the study.

Selection of the Student Participants

Six Biology 30 students, four males and two females volunteered to aid me in this research study. All of the students were taking academic grade 12 subjects. Five were eligible to graduate in June 1984,and the other student being one credit short, was not eligible for graduation.

Three of the participants were taking Biology 30 as their only science subject. While the remaining students were taking two sciences. Academically, the participants' biology class scores ranged from high sixties to high nineties. Those students eligible for graduation had already applied to several universities. Only one student indicated that she might return to school in the fall if her scores were low.

The students were given a contract-form letter detailing the intent of the study (see Appendix 1). I had indicated that they were free to withdraw at anytime,they were asked to sign the form signifying their understanding and willingness to participate. The form also provided a space for parent's/ guardian's signature.

The actual research consisted of five taped one hour discussions. The sessions took place in late May

and ended in early July. Three sessions took place before the students wrote the Biology 30 diploma exam and the other two sessions were held after the diploma exam was written. A more detailed explanation will be given in chapter four regarding the format of the sessions.

Location of the Study

The study was conducted in a large urban composite high school setting. Through my work with student teachers in this school, I came to know the teacher and many of the students. I sensed that this existing relationship would prove to be beneficial to this study. All of the interview sessions were conducted at the school. Several reasons led to this decision; I felt that the participants would feel more relaxed and comfortable in a familiar setting, and the teacher had agreed that he would release the students from class in order to attend these sessions eliminating any problem of accessibility.

Assumptions

This research study is based upon the following assumptions:

1. The participants' perceptions regarding the Alberta diploma exams would not be altered by my involvement with the Alberta Student Evaluation Branch.
2. Through the interview sessions I would come to a closer understanding of the students' perceptions and would be able to reconstruct their lived experiences as they pertained to the study.
3. The highly flexible structure of the interview sessions would enhance dynamic group involvement.

Delimitations

The research study is premised upon the following delimitations:

1. Only one large urban composite high school was selected for the study.
2. The six participants were not randomly

selected - they volunteered to participate in this study.

3. All participants were designated to write the June 1984 Biology 30 diploma exam.
4. No attempt was made to acertain participants' viewpoints regarding the diploma exams before the commencement of the study.
5. The students' viewpoints were not a criteria used in the selection of the participants.

Significance of the Study

I perceive this study to be especially important in view of todays' educational trend towards the resurgance of standardized tests in schools across Canada and United States. The diploma exams in Alberta, after 11 years of absence, were offically reinstated in September 1983. Why? Was it because other provinces were implementing such exams? Was it because public opinion had pressured the government into reinstating these exams? Was it because the government saw this as a way of strengthening a seemingly weakened educational system? This list of possible questions and explanations

could go on but a shared popular opinion seemed to be that these exams were needed to aid a struggling educational system and "to improve student learning" (Edmonton Journal Feb. 29, 1984 - see Appendix 3).

Because of my unique involvement in three of the inter-related groups, I felt that I had indeed a very expansive insight into the topic. First as a biology consultant working for Alberta Student Evaluation, I was directly involved in the construction of five Biology 30 exams. Though this position gave me privy to governmental intents and expectations, it did not provide opportunities to question governmental policies. Second, as a graduate student, I had many opportunities to question the very essence of standardized tests, in particular the diploma exams. Not only were the more obvious effects discussed in our seminar sessions but also the innuendos that were built into the exams and the possible effects it was having on teachers, students, mode of teaching and curriculum. Finally, being a teacher by profession, I found that many of my colleagues were more than willing to air their concerns. I could easily relate to many of their experiences because of commonalities in our experiences.

However, the largest group most directly affected by the implementation of the Alberta Diploma Exams were the students. Teachers, government, and university personnel had established forums whereby they could air their related concerns to each other and to the public. The students were the silent majority. They had no established avenue by which they could convey their concerns. Often no one sought their input. I became very intrigued with this group. I sensed that few people were aware and fewer understood what these students were experiencing with regard to the diploma exam. As I have already indicated in my rationale, my intent in this study was to reconstruct some of the students' lived experiences as they confronted the diploma exams for the first time. Hopefully, this reconstruction would allow people outside of this sub-culture to come to a closer understanding of the issues, complexities, and nuances that students had to deal with in this situation.

Finally, there are some provinces that are still contemplating implementing provincial exams. Fairbrother (1980) indicates that several important questions should be considered before implementing such exams: "what are we doing here?; what is it we have got to ask about?; what are the issues?; and why do we bother

making assessments at all?" (Fairbrother 1980, p.4). Traditionally in education, much evaluation takes place; a copious amount of information is gathered and recorded but without any thought of action afterwards. Unless these questions are addressed by the educational officials of these provinces, evaluation will have little educational significance.

CHAPTER III

THE LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

Research by its very nature, demands that researchers address the many concerns inherent in their study. Irrespective of whether it is a qualitative or quantitative research study, many questions arise, many proposals are made, and many obstacles are encountered. However, the type of questions, proposals, and obstacles will differ vastly depending upon the type of research study one engages in. In my research study, I employed a qualitative approach which by its very nature established my parameters. In an attempt to better understand my study, it is important that readers be given an opportunity to know what it means to be engaged in a qualitative study. This chapter will explore the nature of qualitative research.

The qualitative paradigm as opposed to the quantitative paradigm is a label that encompasses many specific methodological approaches such as phenomenological, ethnomethodological, and

situational-interpretive orientations. The common element in these approaches is the quest to understand the meanings that man gives to his world. My study's orientation is premised in the situational-interpretive mode. The basic underlying philosophy in situational-interpretational studies is that man gives meaning to the situations which he encounters. He and his world are seen as one. In this dynamic relationship, he not only reacts to but acts upon his world. It is he who gives meaning to his world. Wagner stated that to give meaning infers an act of intentionality (Benson 1984). "An intentional act is any act through which a person experiences an object. It is through such intentional acts that individuals establish meanings because once an object is experienced the object is cognitively constituted" (Benson, 1984, p.7). In phenomenological and ethnomethodological studies, the participants' activities in given situations are closely observed and recorded by the researcher. This does not hold true for all situational-interpretive studies. Participants in these studies may be observed in the actual situation or the researcher may interview the participants before and/or after the situation has occurred. In studies of this nature, much projection and recollection by the

participants occurs during the interview sessions. As these personal experiences are recalled, the participants employ varying degrees of critical analysis in order to establish and clarify their meanings to themselves and others.

In order to establish meanings and interpretations, hermeneutics becomes the focal point. Hermeneutics focuses on an interpretative understanding of man in his world. Based upon the fact that this study focuses upon meaning and understanding, a major portion of my structural analytical framework examines the nature of hermeneutics. The first section of this chapter outlines the nature of hermeneutics as it presently exists. By including a brief historical account of the subject, I have attempted to describe how the present conceptualization of hermeneutics came to be.

A most noticeable fact in many of the hermeneutic writings is the belief that the genesis of meaning begins in language. Language becomes the established premise from which interpretative understanding evolves. Schleiermacher believed that "language is the only presupposition in hermeneutics, and everything that is to be found, including the other objective and subjective presuppositions, must be

discovered in language" (Schleiermacher, 1977, p.31). Because of the preceived relationship that seems to exist between language and hermeneutics, a section focusing on the nature of language as it relates to hermeneutics is included.

Language by its very nature, demands interpretation in order to yield understanding (Bauman, 1978). Interpretation necessitates a grammatical examination which explores the structure of the language used while attempting to seek a fundamental meaning. This is followed by a technical examination which attempts to analyze or ascertain the participant's usage of a given word. These are but two methods of interpretation which enables us to understand language. These methods are discussed in a later section.

These areas have constituted the framework of this study. The following sections examine the relativeness that exist between these given areas.

Hermeneutics

Hermeneutics, from the Greek word hermeutikos, is a study concerned with explaining. Explaining in the sense of clarifying, of making obscure plain, and rendering that which is opaque transparent (Beekman's seminars 1984). Hermeneutics has sometimes been defined as the art of understanding. Gadamer (1975) claimed that hermeneutics must be understood in such a way so as to encompass the aesthetic nature (human spirit) and the nature of science, and do justice to each other. "Understanding must be conceived as a part of the process of the coming into being of meaning, in which the significance of all statements - those of art and those of everything else that has been transmitted - is formed and made complete" (Gadamer, 1975, p.146).

Gadamer reported that prior to the nineteenth century, hermeneutics was used to unlock and communicate meanings in fields such as philosophy, religion, and law in order for the populace to understand what was written. Two nineteenth century developments are often cited as the bases for the resurgence of hermeneutics. At the onset of this century, it became obvious to many social scientists that the existing social science was

severly lacking in its ability to help one to fully understand human life (Gadamer, 1975). The underlying reason for this was that the same methodological, paradigmatic approach common to natural science was being implemented in social science. This paradigm or framework consisted of all dominant beliefs, values, assumptions, and techniques that were shared by scientists. The scientific paradigm allowed for total control of every possible aspect of a situation in the hopes of being able to make predictions and establish laws. This realization necessitated a re-thinking and a re-structuring of the social science field. A further development was that epistemology was undergoing critical analysis (Gadamer, 1975). Previously established epistemological assumptions were being challenged by the phenomenological and critical sciences that had been established. Scientific knowledge had traditionally been excluded from sociological analysis. A conception of science knowledge was that it was achieved by an objective individual who investigated an aspect of reality and after much experimentation - according to a prescribed methodology - would arrive at an explanation which was accepted as knowledge. This knowledge which was achieved through scientific means would then reflect

the scientific qualities of stability, coherence, and organization. This objective scientific knowledge did not adequately represent the subjective social world it was deemed to represent.

During the nineteenth century, philosophers developed hermeneutics into a system which became the bases of all human spirt (Geisteswissenschaften) more commonly referred to as human science. This development of hermeneutics was achieved despite the growing powerful claims of natural science to explain the world.

In comparison to human science, natural science was perceived to be the more dominant science. Because of natural science dominancy throughout the nineteenth century, human science was relegated to develop in the shadow of natural science. Natural science was deluged with many accolades due to the perceived superb accomplishments which were credited to this field. It had been unquestionably accepted by the populace as being the dominant paradigm. The goal of natural science, explaining and predicting phenomena, was conceived as a purely intellectual process.

Explanatory knowledge evolved out of scientific methodology. Mannheim (1936) supported the notion that natural science and mathematics were forms of objective

value free knowledge. Knowledge was perceived as being derived from reality and was not socially constructed. Knowledge as a function of reality was more preferable than that which was socially derived. Socially constructed knowledge was culturally dependent reflecting biases, beliefs, and values of the culture and was not adequate when compared to scientific knowledge which was devoid of such perceived subjectivity (Mannheim 1936). Proponents of natural science claimed that its science was uniquely exemplified by observations, established laws, and theories. This perception of science often referred to as Baconian science was developed by Francis Bacon. He emphasized the need to develop an organized scientific method. He believed that it was necessary to gather all available facts, make all possible observations, perform all the necessary experiments, collect, and tabulate all of the findings. From this "scientific method," laws and principles would emerge that could be used to explain all related phenomena. Consequently, a belief evolved that when research was based firmly upon experimentations and quantitative determination it would yield explanations for phenomena. This inductive method popularized by Bacon, investigated specific incidents with the findings being used to

generalize all similar incidents. The deductive method which would begin with what is known generally advancing to the unknown or the more specific was ignored by Frances Bacon (Feibleman, 1972).

This long held view of natural science has been joined by a more contemporary view. Supporters of the contemporary view claimed science to consist of a logical structure that has been socially influenced. Thomas Kuhn (1975) one of the earlier advocates of this view, criticized the seemingly objectiveness and isolation of man in the construction of scientific knowledge. He claimed that science quest for ultimate truth could not be supported by scientific findings. As scientific theories replaced each other, there was no indication that one was closer to the truth than the previous theory. Kuhn denounced the rational procedures implied in the scientific method. Feyerabend claimed that "the combination of the philosophies of the critical rationalists and logical positivists gives an inaccurate account of science because science is more chaotic and irrational than their reconstructed methodological image suggest" (Benson, 1984, p.79). Before The Structure of Scientific Revolution (Kuhn, 1975), there was only one paradigm associated with natural science and that

emphasized objectivity and rational procedures.

As previously indicated, human science developed throughout the nineteenth century in the shadows of natural science. Still, it has not received the same degree of respectabilty that is often accorded to natural science (Bauman, 1978). The goal of natural science goal is explanation whereas the goal of human science is said to be that of understanding. The goal of human science is often met with much criticism because the empirical concept of validity and reliability can not be tested in the human science. Social scientists argue that explanations inferred that there is only one accepted solution or interpretation. These accepted explanations often become omnipotent and dominate all other possible interpretations. Even in the act of defining, a sense of uthority is implied. Social scientists charge that this stock of knowledge and perceived dominance is associated with natural science. They claim that in the act of understanding, there is no one dominant interpretation. Many interpretations are possible in hermeneutics and all are given equivalence (Bauman 1978).

The two sciences were viewed and still are by some, as being polemic. Hermann Helmholtz in 1862, (Bauman, 1978) emphasized the superior and human

significance of human science but noted many shortcomings. Helmholtz attempted to apply the same methodological criteria that was common to natural science. The prevailing assumption was that certain operative procedures such as observation could not be used to examine subjective feelings, intentions, or motives and were omitted from scientific studies. A further assumption was that subjective factors could not yield any methodological problems of their own, since all of the problems could be traced to an external source. The methodological ideal according to Helmholtz, did not demand any historical concreteness nor epistemological restraints. Epistemology sought to set out conditions through which others could come to the same understandings and conclusions.

Schleiermacher (1977) a pioneer in the field of modern hermeneutics, attempted to re-orient this study. Originally, there were two branches of hermeneutics, one concerned with biblical understanding and the other with ancient classical texts. He proposed a general hermeneutics which would combine the efforts of both. He brought the problem of understanding and interpretaion into the forefront of universal human experiences by positing them in the very practice of living. For

Schleiermacher, lived experience included all of those processes that were involved with intellect and understanding. Initially, he was very hesistant in forming his theory of understanding as a given doctrine because the identity or essence of thoughts and language were problematic. After much consideration and in-depth analysis, he resolved that thinking as well as our entire being originated from, and is determined by, the language which gives understanding to our world.

Dilthey (1977) a former student of Schleiermacher, continued to pursue the work originally started by his mentor. He acknowledged the dichotomy of subjectiveness and objectiveness that existed in lived experiences. Dilthey attempted to resolve the division between science and life. Realizing that Kant's epistemology was concerned with natural science, he proposed establishing a branch of epistemology that would pertain solely to human science. This would take into consideration our human world and provide a firmer foundation for human science. He failed in his attempt and consequently understanding and explaining remained as two separate non-equated entities.

"Understanding means going in circles: rather than an unilinear progress towards better and less

vulnerable knowledge, it consists of an endless recapitulation and reassessment of collective memories..." (Bauman, 1978, p.17). The hermeneutic circle was the very essence of understanding. Heidegger (1971) questioned the possibility of rational human self understanding. Schleiermacher's and Dilthey's hermeneutical theory involving understanding and interpretation were perceived to be problematic by Heidegger. Heidegger claimed that understanding was not a simple way of knowing nor was it a method of investigating that which was characteristic of human sciences. To understand is to understand one's perspective within being; this can only be accomplished by projecting one's possibilities. Meaning which governs understanding, is not an isolated subjective act rather it is premised in tradition. Tradition or historicity is influenced by economic and social structures and it is the interreaction of the participants to these structures which constitutes meanings. Heidegger claimed that conscious understanding and the act of interpretation is made possible because of a pre-predictive understanding which is implicit in our Being-in-the-World concept. "Interpretations which present themselves to us are only possible because we are already situated within a

fore-structure of understanding. The knowledge which allows understanding or explanation is derivative of the existentital structure of understanding." (Carson 1984, p.52).

Gadamer (1975) a former student of Heidegger, used Heidegger's analytical proposal as a central theme in his own work. He concluded that the "fusion of horizons" could only take place within language. Gadamer criticized natural science because there was a constant attempt to reduce knowledge to ahistorical, neutral facts. Gadamer perceived conversation to be a hermeneutic experience whereby the world was revealed through language.

Habermas, a critic of contemporary hermeneutics, conceded that the interpretative methods associated with human sciences were severely lacking in their ability to adequately convey the intended meaning of others. Habermas reflected an utopian-like concept; he believed that it would be possible to present an objective critique provided understanding could occur outside of tradition. Gadamer viewed the femoral, the intuitives, and other nuances as essential to understanding. Understanding for Gadamer began with language but Habermas concluded that language can not be the starting

point towards understanding. Language is part of man's cultural heritage; something we are born without but grow into. According to Habermas, language is a man-made convention with its inherent distortions. Many of these distortions are unrecognizable by the participants and interferes with one's ability to seek understanding.

With this brief historical background to the development of hermeneutics, I will proceed to investigate more fully the relationship between hermeneutics and language.

Language and Hermeneutics

Schleiermacher (1977) claimed that language is the only presupposition in hermeneutics and any other presupposition, be it objective or subjective, can only be discovered in language.

Language or linguistics can be studied in terms of its internal structural relations or through its historical development. Diachronic linguistics investigates the historical change and development within a language and synchronic linguistics regard language as an inter-related system which may reveal an image of totality or wholeness. Synchronic language is reflective

of a pre-conscious and intrinsic experience. Lanigan (1977) outlined that synchronic language was indicative of a person's pre-reflective consciousness of the identity inherently conceived in the perception and expression of oneself as a person. This language conveyed a person's subjectivity to another person. Synchronic language has become closely associated with hermeneutics which focuses upon understanding.

Gadamer (1975), Ricoeur (1974), and Heidegger (1971) regarded language as the focal point of hermeneutics. Man can not step outside of language and examine it externally, it can only be examined from an internal perspective. Every human experience is perceived to be lingustically related. The fact that man is able to think and reflect is possible only because it can be accomplished through language. Heidegger (1971) termed language as the "House of Being" through which man is able to exist.

Schleiermacher perceived language as being concerned with the understanding of everything that is cast in language. Language exists as a pure expressive phenomenon until it becomes subjective to the rigor of hermeneutics then it ceases to be.

Gadamer (1975) reported that Dilthey not only accorded ordinary language as being the focal point of hermeneutics but also recognized the ground of intersubjectivity within which understanding is thought to operate. Gadamer conceded that ordinary language exist as a complex structure of symbols and actions and can not be reduced to meta-linguistic rules. Such rules deny the subjectiveness of life experience and reinforce the philosophy of positivism inherent in natural science.

Wittenstein (Hoy, 1978) noted that linguistic rules were social conventions. They are created by man and therefore, can be changed by him. The rules are by no means complete nor can they possible account for every possible usage of an expression. How is it possible to follow a rule which does not have a universal interpretation? Wittenstein recommended that linguistic rules should not be use as a sole interpretative device. These rules should serve as a guideline through which man's interpretative actions and reactions can proceed.

Habermas viewed the pluralism of language games as being destructive to interpretation. Language as a man-made convention with its inherited distortions, can not arrive at "true" understanding.

Ricoeur (Thompson, 1981) acknowledged that a relationship existed between language and experience. The task of hermeneutics is to unlock the meanings that are embedded within the language.

Merleau-Ponty (1970) claimed that language promoted its own oblivion. Its "giveness" can only be actualized by an individual. According to Merleau-Ponty, man's relationship to language is vague, obscure, and almost non-commutable. The operation which converts or transforms language into meaning is itself, an obscure procedure. After a meaning is established, the language or symbols must be re-united with the meaning. This notion has often been described as a hermeneutic circle.

Language possesses a power that is able to bring that which is expressed into existence, but only for those individuals who are familiar with the language. It's only by entering into or submitting oneself to the claims of language, that transformations can occur. Transformation can be seen as opening up one's thoughts to new ways, new dimensions, new landscapes, and new historical concreteness. The transformative procedure is as obscure as is the transformation of language into meaning. The relationship that exist between language

and experience becomes problematic during the transformation process.

Welhelm von Humboldt (Gadamer, 1975) supported the relativeness of language and experience and proclaimed language as a vehicle through which understanding of the world is made possible. Humboldt (Heidegger, 1971) regarded language as a world and the world view. Language "offers a historical presentation of man's whole historical spiritual development in its totality and yet also in its given individuality" (Heidegger, 1971, p.118).

The language which comprised my research data came from group dialogue sessions. Merleau-Ponty (1970) labelled language revealed through speaking as "living language." Through the act of speaking, a person attempts to externalize an internal experience (Lanigan, 1977). As language takes on meaning for the speaker, its objectivity diminishes giving way for increased subjectivity.

Schleiermacher claimed that every act of speaking is dependent upon a given language and is premised upon something having been thought. Each person has the ability of taking a given language and constructing a speech pattern out of it. This act of

speaking represents a brief moment in a person's continuous evolution.

In order for another to understand what is being said, this communique must be interpreted within the development or evolution of that person and also in its relationship to the language usage. Merleau-Ponty claimed that the structure of meaningful language denotes understanding in terms of man's being-in-the-world. The act of speaking, understanding and man's existence in the world appear to be inter-related (Merleau-Ponty, 1970; Schleiermacher, 1977).

Interpretation

It was previously noted that language can be related to every human experience. "There is no experience that is non linguistic" (Rasmussen, 1974, p.17). Interpretation is a subjective activity. It is constituted by human subjects and becomes a vehicle for understanding.

Some social scientists have perceived understanding and interpretation as being two separate entities, but Gadamer disagrees with this separation. In order to interpret, one must be able to understand, and

in order to understand, one must be able to interpret. His philosophy is premised in that understanding is always interpretation and can never be separated.

Schleiermacher's (1977) philosophies are based upon the belief that understanding and interpretation are two separate entities. Schleiermacher acknowledges that interpretation precludes understanding. A linguistic expression is only understood when the meaning is methodically and skillfully constructed. Understanding can only be realized through application of grammatical and technical interpretation.

Grammatical interpretation confines itself to focusing upon the structure of the given language and exploring the possible fundamental expressions. This mode of interpretation is grounded in the analysis of the elements of the language. The technical interpretative mode investigates the individuality and subjectivity within the usage of the language. Rather than employing a fragmented approach as used in a grammatical interpretation, the emphasis is now placed on the holistic nature of the linguistic expression. Grammatical interpretation does not coincide with hermeneutic philosophies because of its stress on objectivity and its implied universality of language

usage. Conversely, technical interpretative approach is in concert with hermeneutics because the importance of the human element is taken into consideration.

According to Johann Droysen (Dilthey, 1977) all understanding is immediate and there exists no degrees or levels of understanding. Dilthey disagrees with this claim and states that a hierarchy does exist and there are various levels of understanding present. He concedes that elementary understanding which is the most fundamental level of understanding, is immediate and is non-reflective. The critical analytical element is not present. This type of understanding is conceived out of an interest in practical life. It does not represent an interpretation of a total expression rather it is limited to grasping a single expression.

Interpretation can not be totally premised in the grammatical or technical interpretative mode. It requires a combination of the two to arrive at a holistic interpretation. The strive towards this holistic interpretation becomes problematic. The individual parts receive their meaning from the whole and consequently, the whole receives its senses from the parts. A question that now requires attention is, "What is meant by the "whole"?". Does it refer to; the whole of the writer's

works, the whole of all literary texts, the whole of language or some other type of whole? Whatever the concept of the whole may be, it can only come about after an assimilation of the parts has been formulated (Plantinga, 1980). Dilthey acknowledges the existence of this problem even in his hierarchical structure of understanding. Given the circumstances, understanding can never be fully realized. Thus all understanding remains only relative and can never be completed (Plantinga, 1980, p.105). E.D. Hirsch (Horton, 1979) suggests that interpretation in grounded in the author's intent. He would conclude interpretations are always the result of "the horizon of intention" of the reader combined with "the horizon of intention" of the author.

Horton states that the interpreter is free to choose how and from where he will start his interpretation. It is this freedom that accounts for a large number of different interpretations arising out of single text or statement. Though the number of interpretations from a particular text seems to be infinite, theoretically there must be a finite number.

No single interpretation could possibly reveal "all" the meanings found within a given text or statement. These multiple interpretations should be

welcomed because they bring to light different aspects of the textual meanings and each interpretation contributes to one's understanding of the text.

My interpretative framework is outlined in the next chapter. It is based upon the framework so often employed by Suransky and Beekman (Suransky, 1982).

CHAPTER IV

DATA ANALYSIS

Overview

This chapter is devoted to interpreting the transcribed conversations of the participants. Historically, research has always been greatly influenced by the scientific method or quantitative approach. Regardless of the nature or intent of the research, the scientific paradigm would be employed to answer questions regarding quality of measurement, validity, and reliability. Michael Patton (1975) reports that several explanations have attempted to explain the importance once ascribed to the scientific paradigm. One reported explanation states that while some social scientists were reassessing the philosophical essence of social science in an attempt to construct their own paradigm, others were using the scientific paradigm to structure and evaluate their qualitative findings.Another reported explanation was that research could only gain "scientific" respectability after it was evaluated according to the scientific paradigm. In addition to

these explanations, many researchers who employed the scientific method were often teaching in educational institutions where they could "nurture students in a commitment to that same methodology" (Patton,1975, p.6).

The scientific paradigm reduced all human events to isolated components that could be quantified, measured, and statistically analyzed. No attempt was made to understand the meaning of human behaviour, man within his own social context, or the relationship between man's thoughts and actions. This apparent limitation brought about a need for alternative approaches which could address such concerns.

The central focus of my study was to search for meaning and understanding in the relationships that existed between my participants and the diploma examination. This focus necessitated using a qualitative approach based on a hermeneutic orientation. Hermeneutics has its origins in breaches of intersubjectivity where we encounter meanings that are not immediately understandable; meanings that lie in the domain of self-representation requiring interpretive effort (Gadamer,1975). Understanding is an event, a movement of history itself in which neither the interpreter nor text can be thought of as autonomous

parts (Suranksy,1982, p.35). As a hermeneutic researcher, I viewed my task as an attempt to interpret a phenomenon experienced by an identifiable group - students, and through these interpretations come to understand what it was like for these students to have experienced the anticipation and writing of the diploma exam for their first time. The research being a situational interpretative study, remained premised in a hermeneutic orientation. My data spawned from "intensive" interview sessions which yielded "thick descriptions" (Geertz,1973). The immediacy of this "thick description," Geertz claims, gives us access to the conceptual world beyond which our subjects inhabit but which becomes vacant, devoid of meaning, if divorced from the site and realm of experience and action (Suransky,1982, p.37).

There were five one hour interview sessions held with the participants. These sessions were not highly structured, rather they were quite informal whereby the participants were encouraged to discuss and share their experiences. Three of these sessions were held before the students wrote the June 84 Biology 30 diploma exams and the other two sessions took place following the writing of the exam.

At the end of the first taped session, I transcribed the tapes and began to analyze the material. I recorded the number of times a theme would be voiced by the other participants in the group and the amount of group support a participant would receive for a spoken comment. I highlighted the participants' dialogue in the transcripts that I felt was supportive of the theme. Often, a comment made by a participant would be rejected or ignored by the group. These comments were beneficial because they revealed variations of the common themes. At the beginning of session two, I returned to the group with my interpretations of the previous session. The students received copies of the transcript along with my thematic interpretations. They were constantly encouraged to elaborate on their transcribed comments. Recalling one particular comment in session one, a student had mentioned that he was never certain what material he had wrong on a test. After further elaboration in session two, I realized the participants seldom received their tests back from their teachers only their marks. The participants would often use the pronoun "they" which may have been used in reference to other students, teachers, parents or government officials. Such perceived ambiguities had to be clarifed so that the

conversation would be meaningful to all of the participants.

The students after being given my thematic interpretations were encouraged to modify or give alternate interpretations to the already specified themes. At the completion of the third session, I had compiled much "thick description." Many of the sub-themes that had surfaced during the three sessions seemed to have addressed one of three less specific themes. These are dealt with later in this chapter.

The same methodological approach was used for session four and five. However, because of the time factor I was unable to schedule a sixth session. I labelled sessions two, three, and five as validation sessions. These sessions gave the participants opportunities to reaffirm or to clarify their understanding of what was being said and resulted in "thick descriptions."

This research involved investigating a phenomenon or a situation from two separate time periods. As a result I have decided to present my analysis under two headings reflecting this separation of time. The first sub-section deals with the analysis of the transcribed material collected before the students

wrote the June 1984 Biology 30 diploma exam. The next sub-section focuses on the analysis of the transcripts collected after the students wrote the Biology 30 diploma exam. In the final sub-section, I have included several reported comments made by other students who have encountered various types of educational standardized tests. Some of their comments and experiences have enhanced many of my thematic themes while others have provided unique variations.

Analysis of the Transcripts of Interviews Which Occurred Prior to Writing the Diploma Exams

My data consisted of transcriptions of spoken conversation. I commenced my analysis by closely scrutinizing the transcripts from session one, two, and three. Originally, I had started with a line by line analysis in which I looked at each sentence in an effort to identify a theme. I didn't find this method to be very successful. Not only was it extremely time consuming, considering the amount of transcripts I had to peruse, but the number of identifiable themes were becoming very specific and too numerous to analyze each individually. However, I did find occasions to use this method which yielded some interesting information that I might have otherwise missed. The method I found most useful was the highlighting approach (van Manen 1984).

This method involved reading several sentences, paragraph, or an excerpt, and from this I would attempt to glean a common theme or themes. Applying the highlighting method, I would underline the actual language used by the participants that I felt was supportive to the theme. It was not unusual to find variations of certain themes which presented an alternate

perspective to an established theme. These variations never received verbal support from the group. After continuously reviewing the first three sessions, I finally was able to consolidate the original sixteen themes into nine less specific themes. After considerable reflection on these nine themes, I was able to merge them together into what I perceived were three general themes.

The themes of anxiety, pressure, equality, and experimentation all addressed the notion of power vs powerlessness. Consequently, I categorized them as sub-themes. Unit tests, teachers tests, and diploma tests were all categorized under the major theme of tests. The last major theme dealt with the perceived impact the diploma exams were having on curriculum, teaching, teachers, and self. Originally, I had intended to restrict the discussion to the June 1984 Biology 30 diploma exam. However, it sometimes became necessary for the participants to comment on other subjects and scheduled diploma exams in an attempt to clarify or to provide further elaboration for their perspectives.

Each one of the three major themes are dealt with separately. Table 1 outlines the major themes and their associated sub themes. Table 2 focuses on the sub

themes associated with power vs powerlessness. With each of the shared sub themes are the supporting thematic statements and noted variations. Table 3 outlines the sub themes related to tests. Again the supporting thematic statements and variations are included. Table 4 profiles the impact diploma exams are having on curriculum, teachers, and students.

Table 1

Thematic Analysis

These themes evolved out of transcripts taken prior to the writing of June 1984 Biology 30 diploma exams.

Major Themes	Sub-themes
Power vs Powerlessness	Anxiety
	Pressure
	Equality
	Experimentation
Tests	Teachers Tests
	Unit Tests
	Diploma Examination
Impact of Diploma Exam	Curriculum
	Teaching
	Teachers
	Self Preparation

Power vs. Powerless

Anxiety

After listening to the participants and reading the transcripts, there was a notion of powerlessness being expressed by the students. I sensed that while they spoke of their anxieties, pressures, and questions of equality, there was an implied notion of their powerlessness. Most of the students express not only resignation but also strong resentment during the interview sessions. Statements such as, "... pretty discouraging, ... frustrating, ... scary, ... no one was certain in September, ... we didn't know we had to write until we were told in October...," all seemed to contribute to the anxiety element. None of the elements contributing to student anxiety were self-imposed according to the students. Diploma exams, government, teachers, and university requirements were all cited as causes of their anxiety. Some of the participants were adamant that they had no input or control over their destiny. Yet, they knowingly resigned themselves to the situation. Paulo Freire (1983) stated that such resignation or adaptation is common among members of an

oppressed society. Such situations often foster camaraderie among the oppressed members.

Many of the students cited the government as being the number one oppressor. Wasn't it the government who was responsible for implementing the diploma exams? Wasn't it the government who constructed the diploma exams? Wasn't the government forcing everyone to write? A student indicated that the diploma exams had little to do with education. The diploma exams were perceived to be more of a political move, to create jobs and satisfy the public.

Even though teachers were also cited as a source of students' anxiety, many of the participants expressed sympathy and concern for the teachers' current situation. The teachers were perceived to be as scared of the diploma exams as were the students, but for different reasons. Many of the students were scared because of the perceived impact the diploma marks could have on their future plans. The marks could be used to restrict some students from entering universities. However, the students believed that the teachers had to be just as concerned as they were regarding the marks. The government could use student marks to determine and evaluate teacher effectiveness. Teachers whose students

scored relatively low on the diploma exams would certainly be dealt with by the government. The concensus of the group was that teachers would not lose their job because of low diploma results by their students. However, they would be reprimanded by school officials and their students' marks on future diploma exams would be closely scrutinized. If an improvement could not be seen in the near future then the teacher would his/her job.

Table 2A

Students' Perceptions of Power vs Powerlessness focusing on the Shared Theme: Anxiety

Theme Statements (excerpts from transcripts)	Variations (excerpts from transcripts)
-difficult to prepare for one exam that has taken the teacher 5 months to cover -its too high (50%-exam) -one climatic exam -pretty scary, frustrating -in Jan. they (teachers)had us scared for June -diplomas mean tension -no one was certain in Sept., we didn't know we had to write until Oct. -pretty discouraging	-don't really care, alot of us will have to come back to raise our marks -teachers are scared to death -nothing you can do about them -no one listens to you -you hope that God strikes you dead the night before the writing -teachers come at you in 3-D scaring the wits out of you

Pressure

Many of the participants claimed they were under alot of pressure. It was not the actual writing of the diploma exams rather it was the resulting diploma marks that had many of them worried. One student reflecting the sentiments of the group, indicated that a direct relationship seemed to exist between exam marks and future success. "If you mess up on the exams, you can mess up the rest of your life. Your future lies in university and you need high marks to get in." After further discussion with the group, I became aware that most students equated success with university degrees and high paying professional careers. No one in the group associated success with non professional occupations. They found it difficult to associate their notion of success with "blue collar" jobs. "Well I guess you could be successful in those jobs ." Nevertheless,this image conflicted with their idea of personal success.

The participants, regardless of their attitude towards diploma exams, had to write them in order to get into an Alberta university. One student seemed willing to challenge the "unfair" system. He indicated that he would go to an American university where none of this

"stuff" (diploma marks) was needed. His stated action seemed to be symbolic of an indirect revolution. He was attempting to defy his oppressors at their own game by seeking an avenue that the government had no control over.

The group expressed much empathy for students who would have to confront the diploma exams in the coming years. They conceded that they were in a more advantageous situation because they had a choice in mark computation. Marks were perceived as being the most important issue. They could either use a compiled mark based upon 50% of the diploma mark and 50% of the teachers's mark or they could use the entire teacher's mark. This option would not be available after the first year. As a result, students in the succeeding years would have to study as rigorously for the diploma exams as they would for the teachers exams if they wish to attain a high mark.

Still, the students were able to find positive elements in the seemingly oppressed situation such as the mark computation. These positive elements seemed to make their situation more bearable giving them a false sense of security.

The participants started to become more reflective in subsequent interview sessions. Much of the sessions' dialogue was initiated by participants. Freire (1974) reported that dialogue takes places when people talk together and experience a closeness and harmony in which no one is afraid to voice their opinion nor is their an attempt by anyone to impose his or her will on other group members. Many of the participants started questioning the basic concept of education. "Education only happens at university... In universities, you really learn things... Things which you'll need later in life." They saw little transfer between what you learned at school and life in general "...an ameba, who really cares?" At school you had to learn "stuff" in order to "get out." This perceived confinement ended when you had successfully learned the "stuff" or memorized the material taught by teachers. "Most of this stuff a person never uses again but you have to learn it so you can get out of school and into university." The participants seldom associated learning, thinking, and education with schools. These could only be attained at universities and high entrance marks were needed in order to gain admission. As a result, the diploma marks became a major concern for the students.

Table 2B

Students' Perceptions of Power vs Powerlessness focusing on the Shared Theme: Pressure

Theme Statements (excerpts from transcripts)	Variations (excerpts from transcripts)
-if you mess up on the exams you can mess up the rest of your life -you can get booklets from the department telling you what you're supposed to know -this year we have the option of using a computed mark or the teachers's mark -if you don't get the high marks you can't make it -your future lies in university so you need high marks to get in -if you don't do well you always have the teacher's mark to fall on -there are no jobs out there so you have to go to university	-less pressure if there were 2 instead of one diploma each worth 25% -you can always go to an American University if you can afford it -more pressure on gd. 11's -next year they'll have no choice but to take the diploma mark

Equality

"They say get an education but they are making it impossible." This statement reflected the sentiments of the majority of the participants. "Society recommends that everyone should get a university education while the government diploma exams are making it almost impossible to get into university." Bewildered, angry and frustrated with the situation, one participant posed the following question, "What ever happened to the American Dream"? Everyone has an equal chance! A North Amercian belief so entrenched within our society, but yet so vulnerable and nebulous when scrutinized. The students proclaimed that university education was becoming less accessible due to many factors such as cost and entrance requirements. The diploma exams was another factor being used to further restrict the accessibility of university education. University education was becoming a luxury item, only available to those people who had attained high entrance marks.

Another factor which seemed to further establish comaraderie among the participants was the conspiratorial notion. The conspirators were those people who were either directly involved in implementing diploma exams or

supporting the implementation of such exams. The students concluded that many of the conspirators were themselves victims of externally prepared examinations. "Just because they had to write them, they think we should write them." Though some felt they were being plotted against, the group unaminously agreed there was little they could do to stop the implementation of diploma exams.

Table 2C

Students' Perceptions of Power vs Powerlessness focusing on the Shared Theme: Equality/Fairness

Theme Statements (excerpts from transcripts)	Variations (excerpts from transcripts)
-they (society) say get an education but they (goverment) are making it impossible -these tests are just not fair -some people choke on tests -why make them so hard so quick -we didn't know about them until we entered grade 12 -in grade 10 you needed a 60 average for university,in grade 11 you needed a 65 average and now you need a 72 average, 12 points in 3 years. It's not fair.	-you can always appeal a low mark -what happened to the American Dream? -Everybody has an equal chance -we're growing up in a democracy and can't get an education when we want -parents don't even think it's fair -it's a conspiracy against us -only those not involved with the actual writing are hollering for them -education is becoming a luxury!

Experimentation

Some of the participants perceived themselves as being test cases or guinea pigs. Within this dehumanized scenario, the students became mere objects. The government or researchers through the implementation of diploma examinations were said to be manipulating, analyzing, and evaluating students, teachers and curricula. "Bang, we're the test case. Our parents resent that their kids are being used as guinea pigs." Two sets of parents were said to be against the implemenation of the diploma exams claiming the old diploma exams served little purpose and these would probably be just as useless. I sensed that when the students mentioned their parents' resentment to the implementation of the diploma exams, it seemed to serve as a morale booster. When a group sympathizes with another in their plight, it not only increases a level of self-awareness, but enables re-establishment of beliefs and humanizes an otherwise dehumanizing situation (Freire,1983).

The teachers were not perceived as being sympathetic by the students. "They are scared too." The students claimed that many of the teachers were more

concerned as to how they would be evaluated in relation to their students' marks. Primarily due to these self-concerns, several of the students believed that teachers were making a concerted effort to ensure that their students would be adequately prepared to write the diploma exams. The remaining students claimed that teachers were genuinely interested in the students welfare.

Table 2D

Students'Perceptions of Power vs Powerlessness focusing on the Shared Theme: Experimentation

Theme Statements (excerpts from transcripts)	Variations (excerpts from transcripts)
-bang we're the test case -they (tests) should have started gradually -the kids in grade 11 are worse off then us, they don't have the option of a compiled mark -poor kids in grade 12 next year are test cases as well	-our parents are upset that their kids are being used as guinea pigs

Tests

Teacher Tests

Three types of tests were of concern to the students; teachers tests, unit tests, and diploma examinations. The students had grown up with teachers tests from the time they had started school. Tests were synonymous with the concept of schooling. Teachers were expected to construct and give tests. Though the participants acknowledged the importance of tests as assessment devices, they reported that tests should not be used as the only source of assessments. Teachers seem to place little importance on student attendance, performance, and participation in terms of using them as an alternate form of assessment. "Test marks do not always reflect what a person knows or has learned." As another student claimed, "Some people choke on tests."

Most of the participants readily associated science tests as having a multiple choice format. It would seem that in their previous educational years, they had been conditioned to expect this. Upon futher elaboration, one student indicated that in science "Your either right or wrong. There are no in betweens." You can easily test whether a person is right or wrong by

giving them a multiple choice test." One of the participants was very much opposed to multiple choice exams for various reasons. "Multiple choice exams are stupid. Any jerk can pull off high marks. If a teacher really wants to test you, they should give essay questions." One student confessed that he had received a high mark on a multiple choice test for which he hadn't studied, by randomly selecting letters. Everyone in the group seemed to concede that a major drawback of multiple choice exams was the ease in which a person could cheat. Sixty percent of the group indicated that they had been involved in some form of cheating. It seemed to be an accepted norm among the group. "There's alot of cheating done during tests." The students displayed little remorse or fear of being caught. Multiple choice exams they claimed, encouraged cheating, "It's so easy to see someone's answer sheet." Meanwhile,throughout this discussion none of the students had even associated the possibility of cheating with essay style tests.

Regardless of the format of the test, all of the participants claimed that testing belonged with the teacher. The participants all agreed that the teacher knew what had been taught and how it had been taught. As a result, teachers should be the only ones designated to

do the testing. The participants' major complaint was that teachers' tests were seldom returned or made available to the students to study from. "You only get the answer key back, you never get to see the tests. What good is that?" It was brought to my attention that after spending nine months in grade 12 these students had received only two tests back of all tests written during that period. Many of the participants concluded that "...teachers don't pass tests back because they are lazy and don't want to make up new tests." No other conclusion seemed plausible to the group. "It's not fair, they're our tests and shouldn't we be the ones to see where we went wrong."

Table 3A

Students' Perceptions of Tests focusing on the Shared Theme: Teachers' Tests

Theme Statements (excerpts from transcripts)	Variations (excerpts from transcripts)
-less confusing than unit tests -they know how and what they taught you -you don't get any of them (teacher's test) back to study from -all science exams are multiple choice you're either right or wrong there is alot of cheating done on multiple choice tests -only get the answer key, back you never get to see the tests again -too many tests given in Biology, about 5 per month -harder to cheat on essay tests -tests take away from teaching time	-we're flunking the teacher's exam because they are too busy getting us ready for diploma -they don't pass the tests back because they are too lazy and don't want to make up new tests -multiple choice exams are stupid any any jerk can pull of a high mark -if a teacher really wants to test you they should give essay questions -you should get something for class attendance or class performance

Unit Tests

Unit tests as previously mentioned, are designed and constructed by the Student Evaluation Branch of Alberta Education. The questions used on the test, were constructed by teachers who had been invited by Alberta Education to participate in Test Item Writing Sessions. The biology 30 unit tests usually consisted of 40 multiple choice questions and two short answer essay questions. These tests were then sent out to previously selected biology 30 teachers throughout the province. Each unit test focused on one unit of the biology 30 curriculum. After the teachers had administered the tests, they were returned to the Student Evaluation Branch for grading. Whether the questions would be used on future diploma exams, modified and re-tested on a subsequent unit test, or discarded, was solely based upon the resulting statistics.

The students strongly resented unit tests. "They're stupid ... much harder than teachers' tests ... some of that stuff is not on the teacher's test at all." Their animosity towards unit tests seemed to further support their claim that "only teachers should be given the right to test students." As stated by one student,

"How do they (government) down there (Alberta Education) know what you're being taught and how you're being taught." Each teacher had their own style of teaching. While one teacher may emphasize the importance of a given topic, another may stress an entirely different area of concern. Many of the students claimed that it's not possible for unit tests to acknowledge the many different modes and emphases used in teaching.

Many students perceived unit tests as having little importance because "once you write them you never get to see them again" and consequently some refused to study for the unit tests. "Why waste your time studying when you won't be able to find out exactly what you had wrong." The majority of students resented the fact that after preparing and writing the unit tests the only feedback a student could expect to receive was a mark. They were never given an opportunity to view their tests because the tests were immediately returned to Alberta Education. One student viewed unit tests as obstacles, "we can't finish off our own work (teacher) because we're too busy writing unit tests." The students reported that several teachers had remarked that the students were lucky to have the opprtunity to write unit tests. This fortuitous event went unnoticed by the students. One facetious response was, "oh goody, we just love to write tests!"

Of the three types of tests that were examined, the unit tests received the poorest overall rating by everyone in the group. Perhaps,this could be attributed to the fact that of the three tests the students had reported they received the least amount of feedback from unit tests.

Table 3B

Students' Perceptions of Tests focusing on the Shared Theme: Unit Tests

Theme Statements (excerpts from transcripts)	Variations (excerpts from transcripts)
-they're (unit tests) stupid	-don't study for them
-you never get to see them again after you write them	-they don't mean anything
-much harder than the teacher's test	-too easy
-some of the stuff is not on the teacher's tests at all	-can't remember what was on the one I wrote awhile ago
-teachers claim we are fortunate to be writing them	-can't finish off our curriculum too busy writing unit tests
-you never get to know what you had wrong	

Diploma Examinations

The diploma exam topic was an area of major concern to the group. Many of the students reported that the diploma exams were responsible for their sense of victimization and injustice, while others stated that the perceived intent of the diploma exams would benefit students, teachers, and the entire educational system.

In the first group discussion, the concensus was the writing of diploma exams should be made optional. At the first session, the participants were emotionally charged. I sensed the students were expressing alot of emotions having been given an opportunity to do so. "...We didn't want them (diploma exam)... No one listens to us... Who decided departmentals?... Those people who aren't involved in the actual writing are hollering for departmentals...." At last, the students had in their midst a person who was willing to listen to their views regarding diploma exams.

In the subsequent sessions, the students started to critically reflect upon their original statements. After further consideration and discussion within the group, some of the participants completely reversed their original statements while others slightly modified their

stance. They discussed the diploma exams as if the exams were capable of initating action. "The diploma exams will raise standards." "The diploma exams will eliminate favoritism and give all students an equal chance of getting high marks." In later sessions, the students were less definite as to what the exams could and could not do. "The diploma exams might eliminate a small amount of favoritism but it can't eliminate it all." "I'm not sure that the diploma exams can raise the (educational) standards." "What do they (government) mean by standards anyway?" They became more critically reflective in their thoughts and started to question concepts that they had previously taken-for-granted.

Initially, the majority of the participants perceived the purposes of the diploma exam was to "raise the standards." One student stated that he was convinced that the diploma exams had little to do with educational standard rather it was "political." The diploma exams meant more jobs as a result job creation was the real reason.

A reported purpose of the diploma exam was to develop and maintain excellence in educational standards (Appendix 2). A few students cited that some teachers were giving undeservingly high marks to some students.

"Teachers are humans. They have likes and dislikes and if they like you, you tend to get higher marks." These inflated marks could be easily attained in English and other social science programs but not in science. The students indicated that their science tests were of a multiple choice format and these tests were seen to be "totally objective." "You're either right or wrong and there is no way you can get an inflated mark." Essay-styled tests were perceived as being highly subjective and could conceivably result in inflated marks. Several students indicated that diploma exams would enable every student an equal opportunity of achieving high scores.

Many of the students implied that the diploma exams could be used to determine whether teachers are "really teaching." Some of the participants stated that "If teachers are really teaching what they're suppose to, then the educational standards would automatically be raised." One participant questioned, "What do they (government) mean by high educational standards? High marks?"

An area that received much attention from the students was the percentage value being accorded to the diploma exams. The students could use one hundred

percent (100%) of the teacher's mark as the final mark or combine fifty percent (50%) of the teacher's mark with fifty percent (50%) of the diploma mark. Everyone agreed that the teacher's mark should account for at least fifty percent of the final mark. Suggestions ranged from a fifty percent value up to one hundred percent. Many of the reasons have been cited in the previous Teacher's Tests section. One student proposed that "...once these exams are perfected, then there would be no need for a compiled mark." This statement evoked much discussion. To presume that perfection could be achieved was "an impossible endeavour" echoed all but one of the group members. At the conclusion of the third session, the majority of the participants still maintained that testing should rest solely in the teacher's domain.

Table 3C

Students' Perceptions of Tests focusing on the Shared Theme: Diploma Exam

Themes Statement (excerpts from transcripts)	Variations (excerpts from transcripts)
-to make certain that teachers are teaching	-to lower student enrollment
-raise educational standards	-some exams were too easy
-eliminates alot of favoritism	-help universities to reach quotas
-everyone has an equal chance	-being used to deny some students entrance into university
-teachers now can't give away marks to their favorite students	-have 2 diplomas instead of 1 each worth 25%
-these tests can never be standarized	-too stiff for 23 & 33 students to write
-should be optional unless you're going to university	-can help you get into university even if a teacher doesn't like you
-its a bunch of crap	-after the diploma have been perfected there should be no compiled mark
-how can they (gov't) make diploma exams when they don't know what & how things are being taught	-the gd. 12 students next yr. have no option they can't use the teachers mark - too bad
-the diplomas are worth 50% of your final it's too high	-it's all political has nothing to do with education
-they (diplomas) should start off being worth 10% & work it up to 50%	-you can compare yourself to other students
-the teacher's mark should always count for 50%	

Effects of Anticipating the Diploma Exams

The participants perceived the diploma exams were having a tremendous impact on almost every aspect of education. The effects the diploma exams had on four designated areas were examined: curriculum, teaching, teachers, and students. All of the participants expressed dissatisfaction with the present curriculum "...boring, useless, doesn't allow for imagination...." They predicted that the implementation of diploma exams would ensure the adoption of a universal biology 30 curriculum which some saw as a positive move because all students would be exposed to the same material. The participants were aware that there were several different biology texts being used throughout the province. Also several schools were piloting a new biology 30 program and both programs allowed for incorporation of optional topics. Many of the participants concluded that the optional topics would become neglected in the classrooms because teachers would not teach nor would students learn material that would not be tested on diploma exams.

The students had already begun to witness the effect the diploma exams were having on teachers. "They (teachers) come at you in 3-D(dimension)." "Teachers are

psyching us out rather than psyching us up." At the commencement of the biology 30 program in February, teachers were indicating to students the types of questions that would most likely appear on the June diploma exam. "They (teachers) really don't know, they're only guessing (about the questions)." Nevertheless, many of the students still recorded the questions or information that had been highlighted by the teacher as possible diploma questions.

In the past, the students' biology 30 tests and exams that were constructed by the teacher consisted only of multiple choice items. Now students were practicing how to respond to essay questions, in order to prepare them for the diploma exam. The participants indicated that the majority of their teachers really cared about them and wanted them to succeed "that's why we're practicing writing essay questions." One of the participants had earlier indicated that the teachers were also being tested and if their students do well, they would "look good". Many of the other participants modified this claim. "Most teachers are concerned with students welfare first, and their own welfare second."

"Because of the diploma exams, the teachers will no longer have the time to talk to you about everyday

things." These everyday things often arose as diversions from the regular scheduled classroom work. The students indicated that they enjoyed these sessions for several reasons. They did not have to memorize this material for a later test, nor did they have to take notes and listen to the teacher, rather they were able and often encouraged to jointly engage in class discussions. "Sometimes you learned alot in those sessions." With the pending diploma exams, teachers constantly indicated to the students that they had little time "to cover the work" and students were given little time to ask questions during class. Opportunities for questions were provided at the end of class "But who wanted to hang around at the end of class? You had to go to your next class." One student indicated that the teachers were so busy preparing students for diploma exams that they were failing to teach material that was on their own test. A large number of students had failed a recent teacher's test because they had not covered all of the work in class.

Another area which provided lively discussion was the notion that "education is becoming a luxury." All of the participants remarked on the increased school enrollment which they mainly attributed to the scarcity

of jobs. Some of the participants predicted a drop would occur in the school enrollment because the diploma exams would "force" the lower academic students out of schools. After further elaboration, I realized that the students were claiming that the resulting low marks from the diploma exams would prevent students from entering university. University was very important to them because it symbolized "real" education. Many of the students perceived that things learned at school are never used after graduation whereas at university "...you learn things that you can use in everyday life." One student indicated that in school one learns to memorize and at university one learns how to think. No one in the group disagreed with this belief.

Though the participants would eventually have to write the diploma exams, they were uncertain as to how they should prepare for them. They strongly resented not recieving their tests back from the teacher. "How are you suppose to know what you don't know, when you don't get your tests back." Some of the participants indicated that they would study from their class notes spending extra time reviewing the "starred items." Everytime the teacher indicated the possiblity of certain items appearing on the diploma exam, the students would mark

the item with a star. One student claimed that he had over 800 starred items in his biology notes. Another participant indicated that he was not going to prepare for the diploma exam in any special way. However, he would be studying for the teacher exam, "...you can't prepare for the diplomas, all you really can do is to go into the diplomas relaxed." Two out of the six students had indicated that they would spend most of their time preparing for the teacher's exam because they would most likely "bomb out" on the diploma exam. They felt that their only chance of getting a good mark was to concentrate on the teacher's exam. The remaining four students indicated that they would be giving the same amount of attention to both exams.

Table 4A

Students' Perceptions of the Impact Diploma Exams have on the Shared Theme : Curriculum/ Teaching/ Teachers

Theme Statement (excerpts from transcripts)	Variations (excerpts from transcripts)
-lower students will be forced out of school -a lot of the curriculum is boring, useless, doesn't make sense, not beneficial, doesn't allow for imagination -the curriculum will now be the same for everyone -people don't want to know the extras just what is on the exam -not everyone is being taught the same stuff so they won't do as well -never anytime left for review during class -only 2 days left at the end of term and that's just for questions -if there were no diplomas teachers could talk to you about everyday things -no time for field trips -many teachers are now more prepared for the June exams -no time to review for teacher's exam barely finished curriculum -teachers are really trying to help students	-teaching can't be individualized because of the tests -education is becoming a luxury -teachers can't change that rapidly to adjust for the diplomas -you get your real education at university -a percentage of the curriculum 20% should be optional & this would be tested on the diploma -teachers are not teaching for their own tests -better teachers are in the city because there is more competition and their students will do better on the diplomas -teachers in farm schools are not specialists they have to teach all subjects it's (diploma) harder for them to help their students

Table 4A (continued)

Students' Perceptions of the Impact Diploma Exams have on the Shared Theme: Curriculum/ Teaching/ Teachers

Theme Statement (excerpts from transcripts)	Variations (excerpts from transcripts)
-everyday they say this is the type of thing that will be on the diploma -most teachers really care about students -they stress only the material that they know will be on the exam -they're constantly reminding us of how much time is left before we write the diplomas	-teachers are psyching us out rather than psyching us up -teachers really don't know what's on the diplomas

Table 4B

Students' Perceptions of the Impact Diploma Exams have on the Shared Theme: Individual Student Preparation

Theme Statement (excerpts from transcripts)	Variations (excerpts from transcripts)
-had to rely on class notes not allowed to get test booklets back to study from -study all of the starred items (in class notes) -how do you know what you don't know when you don't get your test back	-you can't prepare for the diploma exams -don't want to be a social misfit and stay home studying all the time -all you can do is to go into the diplomas relaxed

Analysis of Transcripts Received After Writing the Diploma Exam

Only two discussion sessions were held after the writing of the diploma exams primarily due to time constraints and a lack in accessability of the participants.

After conducting a thematic analysis of these transcripts, I was able to identify four major themes with associated sub-themes. The major themes and associated sub-themes have been presented in Table 5. Table 6 has profiled the participants' perception of the actual writing atmosphere. Table 7 has provided a re-examination of the departmental exams. The actual preparations done by teachers and the individual students are examined in Table 8.

Table 5

Thematic Analysis

These themes evolved out of transcripts taken after the writing of June 1984 Biology 30 diploma exam.

Major themes	Sub-themes
Atmosphere	Tension and Apprehension Confusion Concept of time
Diploma Exam	Format Cheating
Actual Preparation for the Diploma Exam	Teacher Assisted Individual Preparation

Atmosphere

Tension and Apprehension

Most of the participants expressed much tension and apprehension prior to writing diploma exams. On June 25, 1984 at 1:00 pm, the Biology 30 diploma exam was written in the school cafeteria. For the past six months, the participants knew this day would eventually arrive. At one o'clock, they would all be expected to start writing regardless of their opinions, mode of preparation, and future plans.

Two of the participants reported that the actual writing site only served to increase their tension and apprehension. "There were too many people in the cafeteria and too many people (teachers) moving around." They indicated that the familiar classroom setting could have had a positive effect on their diploma scores. "I think I could have done better writing in the classroom because you're more familiar with everything." Three of the participants preferred the cafeteria writing site for various reasons. One student stated, "Classroom writing seems like a pressure cooker. ...you're more aware of every sound (in the classroom)." Another student

indicated "It wasn't so bad (in the cafeteria). Everybody was all tensed up waiting to write the same exam at the same time." I sensed that the culmination of tension and apprehension in that room would in effect, dwarf the level of tension and apprehension of a single student. Only one student indicated that he had no preference regarding the writing site. "I couldn't care less (about the writing site). I just wanted to start writing, to get it over with."

The actual number of teachers supervising the diploma exam remained in doubt. "Four or five teachers, maybe six were supervising." One student described them as "vultures." "They walked around looking at you as if you were cheating." Many of the participants remarked that when they raised their heads up from their papers they felt as if they were being "stared at" by the teachers. One of the participants reported that she found many of the teachers to be irritating. "They looked at your answer sheet and were constantly reading over your shoulder. ...Seriously, it got on your nerves."

Another area that seemed to cause concern for one of participants was the implication that students were not allowed to ask questions. He received an exam

booklet that had several of its questions marred by dark marks making them difficult to read. When he attempted to ask a teacher for help, he was totally ignored. He claimed that he was purposefully ignored and he felt "panicky." However, another teacher did come to offer assistance. All of the other participants indicated that teachers should not answer questions because "in some instances, they may give the answers away." Due to the uniqueness of this situation, the group's consensus was that teachers should provide assistance "but only in situations like these."

Table 6A

Students' Perceptions of Atmosphere focusing on the Shared Theme : Tension and Apprehension

Theme Statements (excerpts from transcripts)	Variations (excerpts from transcripts)
-classroom writing seemed more like a pressure cooker situation	-I would have felt more relaxed writing in the classroom
-in the classroom you are more aware of every sound	-teachers were under alot of pressure because if we didn't do well they would be singled out
relaxed atmosphere in the cafeteria	-didn't care where we wrote
-you weren't allowed to leave your seat for anything once you sat down	-didn't like the vultures (teachers)
-they (teachers) didn't say so but they left you with the impression that you weren't allowed to ask questions	-they (teachers) were walking around looking at you as if you were cheating
-we sat there waiting for one o'clock	-my test had black marks on it and when I asked a question one teacher wouldn't answer it
-at one o'clock they (teachers) said it's one o'clock start writing	another one did
-teachers said "Ready Go"	-some students were pretty relaxed knowing they could use the teacher's mark if necessary
-didn't like the way that some teachers carried themselves	-halfway through I thought "this isn't too bad!"
-4 or 5 teachers were supervising	
-6 teachers were supervising	
they (teachers) looked at your answer sheets and were constantly reading over your shoulder	

Confusion

The confusion theme became evident to me when the students started describing the difficulty they experienced while attempting to find their assigned seat. I was able to reconstruct a mental image based upon the six reported accounts. I could visualize over 100 students entering an unfamiliar writing area, attempting to find their pre-assigned seat by searching through the alphabetically distributed diploma exams. Under "normal" circumstances it would have been difficult for unfamiliar students to arrange themselves in alphabetical order. Given the tension and apprehension already associated with writing the diploma exam, the participants reported that the seating assignment should have been handled in a less confusing manner. "It was ridiculous. You had to run around trying to find out where you were supposed to sit." One of the participants stated that he became frantic when several of his friends had found their places and he still hadn't found his. "It took me a long time to find mine." His concept of time was not measured in minutes and seconds rather it was measured in terms of his own lived experience. This claim was further supported by one of his friends, "It

didn't take you that long." In response to this the former student replied, "Well, it felt like a long time. Anyway, you had already found your seat." This apparent confusion prompted one student to re-emphasize her previous claim, "The classroom would have been less confusing." Another student stated "We were already worked up beforehand, and then this (looking for assigned seats)."

Table 6B

Students' Perceptions of Atmosphere focusing on the Shared Theme: Confusion

Theme Statement (excerpts from transcripts)	Variations (excerpts from transcripts)
-the only problem was finding your test -had to run around trying to find out where you were supposed to sit -we were already worked up beforehand and then this(looking for place) -I couldn't find my paper for the longest time -there were two tests to every table & you had to go looking for your test	-the classroom would had been less confusing -everything was arranged beforehand in alphabetical order

Concept of Time

While writing the diploma exam, the participants were constantly aware of the time constraints. As one student indicated, "I really didn't care where we wrote as long as there was a clock present in the room." The time allotment for the Biology 30 diploma exam was two and a half (2 1/2) hours long. The students had been previously conditioned by teachers "...to use your time well." One participant expressed surprise that he was finished in an hour "I really thought I would be pressed for time." Several other participants indicated that "if you wanted a really good mark you had to stay longer to write." What determined longer? One hour, two hours or the total allotted time. The consensus was that an hour should be the minimal amount of time spent writing the diploma exam. The group found it unconceivable that a student could finish the exam after a half an hour and still achieve a high mark. Only one participant indicated that he stayed for the two and a half hour period. Yet, he seemed compelled to justify his stay, "I'm pretty slow when it comes to writing tests and things."

Many students had gone into the exam anticipating that they would not have enough time to

finish writing the exam. Though they were surprised to have finished earlier then they had expected, they were relieved to know that they weren't being pressured by time. "...The extra time was there if you needed it."

Table 6C

Students' Perceptions of Atmosphere focusing on the Shared Theme: Concept of Time

Theme Statement (excerpts from transcripts)	Variations (excerpts from transcripts)
-I wasn't expecting to be done in 45 min but I was glad the extra time was there -I was done in a hour -you had to stay an hour -they gave you alot of time to write -it didn't take long to write -if you wanted a really good mark you had to stay longer to write	-I used the whole 2 1/2 hr. but I'm slow -we were expecting something that would take us 3 years to write -I had to kill 10 or 15 min waiting for the hour to be up -I spent alot of time on the essays

Diploma Examination

Format

The students had been psychologically prepared to expect an extremely difficult diploma exam. They were unprepared for what they had considered was "a relatively easy test (exam)". Not only did the students express surprise at the relative ease of the diploma exam, but also for many of them the diploma exam proved to be an anti-climax. "...the test (exam) was sort of a let down because all year you were told that you're gonna get killed on the departmentals (diploma exam)." The students often referred to the diploma exam as departmental exams. This unofficial labelling was due to the association of the diploma exam with the Department of Education.

Another student perceived himself as being a victim of a cruel joke. "...the exam was a joke. All the buildup beforehand. The scare tactics (by teachers) prepared you for the worst. And then this (exam)."

Regardless of the participants' initial comments, they were all relieved to find the diploma exam easier than they had anticipated. The diploma exam

consisted of 80 multiple choice questions and 8 written response questions. One student stated that "The multiple choice questions were too easy." While others claimed that the questions were worded in such a way that it was difficult to understand what being asked. "You had to decipher it first before you could answer it." Many of the participants resented reading long descriptive multiple choice questions. "They could have been boiled down to one simple question." One student in an attempt to rationalize the situation stated, "In those long questions alot of stuff was added to confuse you. They wanted it that way so you couldn't breeze through it." Another student reasoned that "They wanted you to think more." He perceived that students entering university must be able to think and read at a certain level. "The complex English used on the diploma exam is meant to weed out those people who can't think and read at a biology 30 level."

There were questions on the diploma exam that no one in the group had studied in their school biology program. Many claimed that these "trick" questions were included on the diploma exam to ensure that no one would be able to make a perfect score. "You couldn't come out of the test making a hundred percent (100%), they have to get you for something."

Table 7A

Students' Perceptions of the Diploma Examination focusing on the Shared Theme: Format

Theme Statement (excerpts from transcripts)	Variations (excerpts from transcripts)
-wasn't too bad, 80 multiple choice questions and 8 short answer questions	-half of it (questions) was a lot of crap
-I started writing and thought this was easy	-odd trick questions present
-test was sort of a let down because all year it was" you're gonna get killed on the departmental"	-either you know it (the answer) or you don't know it
-half page questions that could have been boiled down to one simple question	-multiple choice questions were too easy
-long answer questions were difficult because we didn't do many this year	-the build up before-hand may have helped the students to take the test more seriously
-it was geared to where you could easily score 50%	-not as good as the teacher's tests they were too general and really didn't test you on specifics
-you couldn't come out of the test making a 100%, they'll get you for something	-if you can cut through all the worthless garbage it was no harder than some of the real teacher's tests
-some questions you hadn't seen before but that was to sort out the 90's students from the 80's students	-more long answers would have been better because the multiple choice questions were too easy to

Table 7A (continued)

Students' Perceptions of Diploma Exams focusing on the Shared Theme: Format

Theme Statements (excerpts from transcripts)	Variations (excerpts from transcripts)
-in those 1/2 page questions they added alot of stuff to confuse you -they wanted it that way so you couldn't breeze through it -this way you had to think more -the complex English they used I guess was meant to weed people out -the multiple choice questions were worded in such a way that you had to decipher it first before you could answer it -the exam was a joke-all the build up beforehand scare tatics -you were prepared for the worst -sort of a relief to find it easy -didn't like the writing (essay) section -hardly any questions on reproduction and that was a major unit -we did alot of things in class that weren't covered on the diploma	cheat on -they were easier than unit tests to cheat on -still don't like the idea that the mark accounts for 50%

Cheating

The notion of cheating was raised on several occasions. Several of the participants expressed their involvement in cheating on previous teacher's tests. Initially, they were concerned that many students would attempt to cheat on the diploma exams. However, some of the participants indicated that the large number of supervising teachers were able to prevent much of the cheating. Yet one of the students claimed "It was easy to cheat on the diploma exam, you sat facing each other at the table. If you really needed a good mark, just sit behind someone smart." Though the seating was alphabetically arranged, some students exchanged places without teachers' knowledge or approval. One student claimed that "There should have been more essay questions on the exam so people couldn't cheat. You could easily cheat on the multiple choice section."

The notion of cheating was treated very lightly. There was no perceived guilt or remorse associated with cheating. I sensed that it was an accepted part of schooling and many of their reported stories and experiences seemed to further substantiate this concept.

Table 7B

Students' Perceptions of Diploma Exams focusing on the Shared Theme: Cheating

Theme Statements (excerpts from transcripts)	Variations (excerpts from transcripts)
-you sat facing each other at the table so it was easy to cheat -if you really needed a good mark just sit behind someone smart -with all those teachers supervising it was harder to cheat	-harder to cheat on these departmentals -there should have been more essay questions on the departmentals so people could not cheat -you could easily cheat on the multiple choice section

Actual Preparation

Teachers Assisted

Most of the participants claimed that teachers could have done more to better prepare their students for diploma exams. They all agreed that the essay section on the diploma exam was the most difficult due to their inexperience in writing essay style responses. "They (teachers) should have had us writing more essay questions in class. I guess overall, they (teachers) didn't do too bad preparing us." Many students acknowledged that the teachers were unaware of the exam's content. In addition to this, the students perceived that the teachers were under a lot of pressure because if their students did poorly they would be held responsible and dealt with accordingly by the administration. Though all of the participants acknowledged the teachers' perceived dilemma, they strongly resented the fact that the teachers' tests were not returned to the students. "I don't see the point of having tests if they're just for the benefit of the teacher. Aren't we here to learn and find out what we don't know? But how can we, when we're not given back our tests."

The unit tests that were given to the students seemed to be an exercise in futility. "The unit tests didn't help us at all because you never did get to find out what you had wrong." The students were told by their teacher that they should consider themselves fortunate to have opportunities to write unit tests (see Table 3B). The students did not considered the tests to be beneficial, because there was no feedback. One student cited that the unit tests took up valuable time that could have been used for reviewing and many of the others agreed.

Table 8A

Actual Preparation for the Diploma Exam focusing on the Shared Theme: Teacher Assisted

Theme Statement (excerpts from transcripts)	Variations (excerpts from transcripts)
-they should have had us writing more essay questions in class -they could have prepared us better if we had gotten our tests back -those unit tests didn't help us at all because you never did get to find out what you had wrong -little time left for review	-they really didn't know what would be on the departmental -they really didn't do too bad preparing us -I don't see the point of having tests if they are just for the benefit of the teacher. Aren't we here to learn and find out what we don't know

Individual Preparation

"You can't prepare for biology, it's all memorization," claimed one student. Most of the participants disagreed with this and indicated that they had prepared for the biology diploma exam. Some had placed more importance on the teacher's exam and spent more time preparing for this exam rather than the diploma exam. One student indicated that he had been studying for some time "...and was quite confident going in to write the diploma exam." Several students reported that they could have been better prepared if they had received their tests back. Others had to write as many as five diploma exams. As a result, it became more difficult to adequately prepare for each teacher exam and corresponding diploma exam. It became necessary for some students to prioritize their subjects. As one student indicated "You can't study for English and I'm pretty good in math, so I was able to spend more time studying biology."

Overall, the majority of students did take it upon themselves to prepare for their biology diploma exam.

Table 8B

Actual Preparation for the Diploma Exam focusing on the Shared Theme: Individual Preparation

Theme Statement (excerpts from transcripts)	Variations (excerpts from transcripts)
-I looked over it the night before just to jog my memory -I studied for my class (teacher's) test and not so much for this -if I had studied more it would have confused me -some kids had to write 5 diploma exams so they had to decide which ones they would spend more time studying -I studied for a long time and was quite confident going into the exam -I understood it better than those who memorized it -could have been better prepared if we had gotten our tests back	-you can't prepare for biology it's all memorization -I didn't prepare at all for the test -those who wrote departmentals in January found these(June) departmentals easier because they knew what to expect

Supportive Literary Material

According to Suransky's and Beekman's data, one should not limit their source of information to the material collected from the group. It is often possible to grasp a better understanding of a given situation by comparing a similiar experience in a different context. The new material may enhance the already identified themes or it may provide a novel variation.

I became interested in knowing whether my research participants were unique in their perceptions and analysis or had other students expressed similiar concerns in parallel situations.

An article taken from New Direction for Testing and Measurement (Walton,1982) was premised upon comments made by three American students who had to write the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT).

One student reportedly stated that a test score represents one small aspect of an individual. So many things done by students in a classroom are often overlooked by the teacher and as a result credit is seldom received during evaluation. This similiar claim had been raised by one of my students in an earlier session. He claimed that class participation and

performance should be taken into account when evaluating students."...Why bother participating in class or doing homework if it's not worth anything."

Another common theme from the article was that of perceived pressure. One American student stated that she was under considerable pressure "...The most important thing is getting high SAT scores so you can get into college" (Walton 1982,p.113). All of the participants in my study indicated that they had applied to universities. As a result, they claimed they needed high marks to apply which accounted for some of the pressure they felt. The association of success and university education was implied several times throughout the article.

Another American student claimed that the preparations carried out by her teacher was far more superior than those carried out by other teachers. Her perception was that teachers, who were specialists in given areas or held masters' degrees could better prepare their students for such exams. My group expressed a variation of this theme. They indicated that city students would be better prepared to write the diploma exams because city teachers are better qualified than their counterparts in rural areas. Those in rural schools

would have to teach many different subjects and the perceived lack of expertise in the various subjects would put their students at a disadvantage. Yet, earlier a student had indicated that the diploma exam would enable "everyone an equal chance at making a high mark."

The last comment aired by one of the American students echoed a sentiment shared by each participant. She claimed that "...the ideal thing would be for the (SAT) test, along with the student's answer sheet and the correct answer sheet, to be returned to the student." This was a variation of a proposal put forth by the group. The students claimed they were justified in asking for the unit tests and teachers tests to be returned to them not only to study from but also to find out exactly what responses were correct and incorrect.

Even though the article dealt with a different type of standardized test the lived experiences of these American students not only lend credence to some themes but also lend variations to others. By broadening the area from which I could gather information, it has enabled me to increase my awareness of the students' lived experience.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, EDUCATIONAL IMPLICATIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND PERSONAL REFLECTIONS

Overview

This study was undertaken as an exploration into the nature of students. In particular, it focused on "what it is to be a student confronting diploma exams for the first time?" The six participants were Biology 30 students who orginally volunteered to four, but later agreed to five in-depth group interview sessions. Three one-hour taped sessions took place prior to June 25, 1984, the writing date of the Biology 30 diploma examination. The remaining two sessions were scheduled to follow this examination. The interview sessions which were informally structured, started to acquire more dialogical characteristics as the study progressed. Rather than having the questions originate from the interviewer, questions started to originate from within the group. The increased solidarity within the group seemed to have resulted directly from increased communication and dialogue among the participants. The

taped interview sessions became my research data. Each session was transcribed and the resulting transcripts were returned to the participants for validation and clarification purposes. The importance of the validation sessions were explicitly stated to the participants. I constantly encouraged the participants to validate the thematic analysis which I had derived from each transcript. The themes were further identified based upon the clarification, elaboration, and modification efforts of the participants.

Summary

Recognizing that students represent a dynamic everchanging culture, I attempted to strive for a greater understanding of selected members' perceptions of the diploma exams. The conversation were of immense importance because through critically analyzing their thoughts, the participants were able to reassess their own perceptions and convey clearer meanings to the group.

The research method was premised in a situational-interpretive mode. It enabled the students to openly comment on their held-beliefs and perceptions. They were constantly modifying and reassessing their

perceptions. The informality of the interviews gave the participants a sense of freedom to share their concerns with the group.

Taping the sessions enhanced the value of the study. I had the opportunity of being able to replay the anticipated sessions numerous times. The actual transcribing and interpreting of the data was very time consuming. Listening to the recorded words, tones, pauses, and emphases used by the participants seemed to give me a deeper understanding of what had "really been said." It seemed that with each playback of the tapes, I was coming closer to understanding the group. Had the transcript been professionally prepared, I would have lost this valuable opportunity.

The participants perceived diploma exams to have many negative effects. They claimed that the time which had been allotted for field trips and various lab activities, was being used by the teacher in preparation for the diploma exams. Many class discussions which had focused on optional topics were being curtailed , in order to allow more preparation time for material that would be on the exam. The study showed that many of the students'negative perceptions resulted from lack of communication between themselves and teachers. The

students did not understand the rationale for the diploma exams and testing procedures. The diploma exams caused much stress for the students because they perceived that the resulting scores were of immense importance for university entrance.

The study also revealed that unit tests had little educational value for the students. These tests were responsible for much student frustration because the students received their scores and were never given their tests back. No opportunity existed for students to review the questions they had answered incorrectly.

Recommendations

I would recommend, if such a study were to be undertaken in the future, that it would be advisable to investigate the effects of the January rather than the June exams. In my study, time became a major factor. In the three schooldays remaining after the June examination date, I had hoped to schedule one interview and two validation sessions. Even after omitting the final validation session, it still became necessary to extend my time frame into July for numerous reasons. Not only did I have to prepare transcripts with an accompanying

thematic analysis but also the students became less accessible because of summer jobs and vacations. The January time frame would not only allow more time to schedule additional validation sessions but also the students would be more accessible.

A second recommendation is that the researcher should observe the classroom environment. On several occasions, I saw the impact the diploma examination had on a few teachers. These teachers could always be seen carrying a copy of the January diploma examination booklet. Much of the group discussion had focused on the impact the diploma exams were having on teachers, teaching style, and lesson content. These observations by the researcher could enhance the discussion sessions. The researcher having been exposed to the classroom environment, could perhaps better understand the students' interpretations of classroom situations.

The third recommendation is that teachers should be aware of students' anxieties and try to reduce them. This could be accomplished by discussing the rationale and testing procedures of the diploma exams. Perhaps, the students' anxiety level could be reduced if there was more focus and emphasis placed on content and not just the resulting diploma scores.

The present writing of unit tests are not benefical to the students. A fourth recommendation is that they should be abolished unless some system is implemented so that students may have an opportunity after writing the tests, to view and receive constucted feedback .

A fifth recommendation is that Alberta Education should reassess the value allotted to diploma exams. Many of the participants claimed that diploma exams should not carry a weight of 50% in the computation of marks. This perceived value created much stress and anxieties for the students. Perhaps, the relationship that seems to exist between the level of students' anxieties and the weight of diploma exams should be examined

Another recommendation is a long term research study could be designed to examine the attitudinal and perceptional changes experience by junior high students towards the writing of diploma exams.

A final recommendation is that teachers, administrators, test developers, and parents as identifiable groups, could be used in similiar parallel studies.

The tremendous co-operation displayed by the teacher and the willingness of the participants to co-operate in this study was reflected in my prompt acceptance by all concerned. I would assume that the methodology was found to be favourable and would endorse its use in similar studies.

Educational Implications

This study provided some students who eventually had to write the diploma exams, an opportunity not only to express but to analyze their perceptions and concerns regarding the writing of exams. The study seemed to indicate that many of the students' negative comments resulted from the lack of communication between the teacher and themselves. If the teachers were made aware of students' concerns, they may have been able to reduce the levels of students' anxiety, and students' perceived pressures by encouraging a class discussion of concerns related to diploma exams.

This study may also prove to be useful to educational test developers. Some of the students perceived the longer multiple choice questions as questions designed to specifically confuse them and to

ensure that no one would make a perfect score. Many resented reading through a chart or interpreting a diagram only to find one or two related questions. They felt such charts or diagrams warranted at least three or four related questions.

The readability of some questions especially the longer ones, was discussed. Some questions were not clearly stated while others became more confusing as the students attempted to interpret the given data. The participants indicated that the straightforward questions were less confusing and easier to answer. Most students seemed to resent any question that had both a lengthy stem and associated responses. One student,s perception was that these questions were used to prevent students from making high marks. Another student indicated that such questions were being used to determine if students could read at a university level.

The essay style responses were perceived to be problematic by many of the participants. Based upon their previous experience with school science tests, many had little or no experience writing science essay questions. It was indeed surprising to hear a student express that "science tests are always multiple choice." Though they had practice writing essay questions prior to

the diploma exam, their lack of confidence in this area only served to increase their anxiety level.

If test developers were aware of the number of students who shared similar or other concerns they may be able to modify tests based upon such concerns. Another possibility of this awareness may be that such related concerns could be taken in to consideration when interpreting students' scores thereby revealing a more holistic image for test developers and educators.

Finally, other provinces contemplating implementaion of provincial exams may find this study to be beneficial. This study provides a student perspective toward diploma exams. If the identified concerns and problems of students can be addressed, then perhaps the implementation of such exams would be less traumatic to students and provide more accurate measures of their capabilities.

Personal Reflections

It would be a grave shortcoming should I attempt to end this dissertation without relating my own lived experiences as they pertain to the study. I had originally planned on doing a quantitative study that I

thought would parallel my science background. A few months into the graduate program, I became aware that my conception of science was restrictive and stereotypic. I had been promoting this objective, quantitative image of science in my classroom.

Shortly after I became involved with the Alberta Student Evaluation Branch, a colleague and I began discussing the subjectiveness found in science tests. He encouraged me to use this as the basis for a research study. Enthusiastic with the fact that I had at last found a topic that was extremely interesting, I presented the concept to my advisor whose enthusiasm and support served to enhance this study.

My original proposal was to use two high schools and interview one teacher and twelve students from each focusing on their perceptions of the diploma exams. Two interview sessions would be held before the actual writing of the diploma exam and two afterwards. After many alterations and modifications, I finally arrived at a more manageable project. It enabled me to focus solely upon the students' perspective and with an intended group of six students from one school, I was now able to schedule more in-depth interview sessions. I was not

prepared to start interviewing in January 1984, so I had to delay the start until May 1984 just prior to the June 1984 diplomas.

Even though I was now embarking on a qualitative research, I had originally thought that it was essential to maintain a certain distance so I would not contaminate my research findings. After reading much relevant literature and engaging in the actual study, I became as much a part of the study as were my participants. At first, I had been apprehensive as to how I would conduct the interviews. Reading the literature, I found there were as many recommended approaches as there were published articles. I finally concluded that there was no one correct way of interviewing nor was there a correct way of posing questions. One of Paulo Freire's works seemed to substantiate my claim:

> Human relationships with the world are plural in nature whether facing widely different challenges of the environment or the same challenge, men are not limited to a single reaction pattern. They organize themselves, choose the best response, test themselves, act and change in the very act of responding (Freire, 1983, p.3).

My inexperience in interviewing was very evident at the first session. I sensed that everyone including myself, found the atmosphere apprehensive. As we came to know one another better during subsequent sessions, the atmosphere became more relaxed and informal which stimulated more spontaneity within the group. The sessions became almost dialogical in the Freirian sense (Freire, 1983). There was more openness and willingness to exchange ideas and many questions were initiated by the group. In this atmosphere of spontaneity, I was actually learning and understanding more about the students and myself. The sessions seemed to become invigorating and stimulating to everyone involved. This was evident in their eagerness to participate in the discussions. Thoughts, feelings, knowledge, and lived experiences of everyone were mutally shared and these provided the bases for critical reflection.

Transcribing the tapes was often a very frustrating task that was extremely time consuming. Recognizing that only I could vividly recall the situations, gestures, tones, and innuendoes used by the students, I realized that only I could do justice to the transcription. The interpretations were easier to arrive at because of the participatory efforts of the group and myself.

The next major task was writing the dissertation but before I could start the actual writing, I needed to reflect on the entire experience. At the start of this research, I had decided to keep a log book. This book has proven to be invaluable to the writing of this dissertation. I noticed while leafing through the pages that many of my original assumptions, presumptions, and thoughts, had undergone transformation. I became more aware of things which I had previously taken for granted. I started to reassess my role as a teacher and I became more aware of students' actions and comments. I was guilty of some of the charges the students had levied against their teachers.

There was always a degree of uncertainty that accompanied each interview session. Though I discovered some startling things about myself and the participants, there was always an urge to continue on. I often wondered where would this end or would it ever end? I don't know if such a research ever actually ends but I do know that the journey or experience of the study has been personally rewarding. Robert Persig has adequately expressed my sentiments in the following excerpts:

> ...If all human knowledge, everything that is known, is believed to be an enormous hierarchaic structure, then the high country of the mind is found at the uppermost reaches of this structure in the most general, the most abstract consideration of all.
>
> Few people travel here ... it has its own austere beauty that to some people make the hardships of traveling through it seem worthwhile.
>
> ... one has to become adjusted to the thin air of uncertainty, and to the enormous magnitude of questions asked,and to the answers proposed to these questions. The sweep goes on and on obviously much farther than the mind can grasp,one hesitates to go near for fear of getting lost in them and never finding one's way out (Persig, 1974,p.11).

In closing, I can only hope that the reading of this dissertation has proven to be as enlighting as it was conducting the study.

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Appendix 1

- Copy of Student's Release Form -

To Whom It May Concern:

This letter serves to indicate to all participants that this study is based upon voluntary participation and that a person may withdraw at anytime during the course of the study. It is hoped that all participants will attend all four required sessions slated for May and June.

The attached letter indicates that the researcher has received prior approval from the university, two school principals, and two biology teachers. The letter also critiques the purpose of the study.

Your child has indicated their willingness to engage in this study and as a parent/guardian, I would request that you indicate your consent by signing this form. The confidentiality of the actual responses will be ensured.

If at anytime you wish to contact the researcher regarding any concerns, feel free to do so at these numbers: 488-1025(home), 432-2017(office).

Thank You;
Ms. A.E.L. Dorrington

Student:----------

Parent/Guardian:----------

Appendix 2

- Copies of Ministerial Releases -

Alberta NEWS RELEASE

EDUCATION

NEWS RELEASE #6 FOR RELEASE: 8:15 a.m., Tuesday, February 28, 1984

EDMONTON -- Education Minister David King today released the provincial results of the Grade 12 diploma examinations administered in January 1984. Individual results statements are being mailed to approximately 25 000 students this week.

In releasing the examination results, Mr. King stated that he was pleased with the overall results in English 30, English 33, Social Studies 30, and Chemistry 30.

Approximately 8000 students wrote the English 30 examination and achieved an average mark of 61.1 per cent. For the almost 4800 students who wrote English 33, the average examination mark was 63.8 per cent. The average of school-awarded marks in English 30 was 63.7 per cent, while that of English 33 was 59.3 per cent.

Approximately 7100 students wrote the Social Studies 30 examination and achieved an average mark of 62.4 per cent. The average of school-awarded marks in Social Studies 30 was 64.5 per cent.

Nearly 5700 students wrote the Chemistry 30 examination, attaining an average mark of 62.5 per cent. The average of school-awarded marks in Chemistry 30 was 65.9 per cent.

Students did not perform to expected levels of achievement on the examinations in Mathematics 30, Biology 30, and Physics 30. Analysis of the results for each of these three examinations indicated that, while the examination questions were fair, the overall difficulty level of the questions was too high. As a result, student scores were adjusted to avoid an unacceptably high failure rate during this transitional period.

The Mathematics 30 examination was written by approximately 7600 students, who were awarded marks that averaged 61.8 per cent. The average of school-awarded marks in Mathematics 30 was 65.2 per cent.

The almost 5600 students who wrote the Biology 30 examination were awarded marks that averaged 59.9 per cent, and the average of school-awarded marks for Biology 30 was 65.6 per cent. The Physics 30 examination was written by approximately 2700 students, who were awarded marks that averaged 60.3 per cent. The average of school-awarded marks in Physics 30 was 67.6 per cent.

Examinations in Mathematics 30, Biology 30, Chemistry 30, and Social Studies 30 are available in both English and French. Thirty students in Mathematics 30 and fourteen students in Social Studies 30 chose to write the examinations in French. The marks achieved by these students are included in the above-noted summaries.

A student's final standing in a diploma examination course is made up of 50 per cent of the diploma examination mark and 50 per cent of the mark awarded by the school. In order to obtain credit in any of these courses, the student must earn a final course mark of 50 per cent. Results statements for individual students will show all three of these marks.

A detailed analysis of the examination results will be prepared in March to assist schools and school boards in monitoring their students' strengths and weaknesses in relation to the key objectives of the programs of study.

In explaining the difference between the school-awarded mark and the diploma examination mark, Mr. King stated that the school-awarded mark reflects achievement in all of the objectives of a course while the diploma examination score reflects achievement in those major objectives of a course that can be examined by a paper-and-pencil test.

.../3

As a final comment, Mr. King expressed his appreciation to school boards, superintendents, principals, and teachers for their co-operative efforts in launching the diploma examinations program.

"I would especially like to take this opportunity to thank the many classroom teachers who marked the more than 41 000 examinations in seven subjects," he said. "Without their active participation, it would have been impossible to administer the examinations successfully.

"I am gratified by the strong support that the provincial diploma examination program has received across the province," Mr. King said. "I am confident that participation in and administration of these examinations will result in higher standards of education in Alberta."

- 30 -

For further information, please contact:

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Red Deer	343-5262
Calgary	297-6353
Lethbridge	329-5243

Ministerial Statement by: Honourable David King
Department: Education
Subject: Provincial Examinations
Date: Tuesday, May 31, 1983

Mr. Speaker, as Minister of Education I would like to announce that beginning in September of 1983, all Grade 12 students in Alberta will be required to write provincial examinations in order to receive a high school diploma.

These examinations will be course specific and will account for one-half of each student's graduation marks. The final course marks will be a 50-50 weighting of a school-awarded mark and the diploma examination mark. The student's transcript will include three marks — the local mark awarded by the teacher, the mark obtained on the provincial diploma examination, and the weighted mark which is the average of the first two marks.

Two levels of diplomas will be awarded by Alberta Education: the General High School Diploma and the Advanced High School Diploma.

To qualify for the General High School Diploma, students will be required to meet the current high school course and credit requirements, and will be required to write a provincial diploma examination in at least language arts, either English 30 or English 33.

In order to acknowledge a higher academic achievement among students who follow a more challenging high school program, an Advanced High School Diploma will be awarded. These students will be required to meet the current course and credit requirements for a high school diploma, and will write provincial diploma examinations in English 30, Social Studies 30, Mathematics 30, and at least one of Biology 30, Chemistry 30 or Physics 30.

To achieve credit, grade 12 students will be required to obtain a final course mark of 50 per cent or better. At the grades 10 and 11 levels, the minimum mark for receiving credits will continue to be 40 per cent; however, except in unusual circumstances, students must receive at least 50 per cent in order to take the next course in that sequence.

Students will receive individual results statements from Alberta Education, and achievement profiles by school will be provided to schools and to school jurisdictions.

This new direction by Alberta Education is important in order to develop and maintain excellence in educational standards throughout the province. External examinations are essential, educationally sound, and they are an efficient and accurate means of testing and monitoring student achievement.

Alberta Education's January discussion paper on student evaluation stimulated much public discussion. Responses to that document showed overwhelming support for the implementation of these provincial examinations.

We recognize that provincial examinations are, in themselves, not the only means of testing achievement. That is why the teacher awarded marks will account for 50 per cent of the students final mark in that course. Local evaluation continues to be an essential component of student evaluation.

In order to ensure a high quality of education for children in Alberta, other evaluation processes will be undertaken by Alberta Education. However, we recognize that student evaluation responds to only some of our challenges. Other initiatives will be taken in the areas of teacher

evaluation, program, school and system evaluations, teacher training, certification and curriculum. We intend to initiate a major review of our secondary program of studies in the very near future.

Mr. Speaker, as Minister of Education, I want to emphasize that education for the future will continue to offer a high standard of academic excellence on an equal basis to students throughout Alberta.

Thank you.

* * *

Appendix 3

- Excerpts from the Edmonton Journal Newspaper -

Diploma exam called 'a snap'

By CAROLYN HEIMAN
Journal Staff Writer

Education history was remade Tuesday when about 16,000 Grade 12 students throughout Alberta wrote a province-wide exam for the first time in 11 years.

After all the raging debate surrounding the return of the Department of Education exams — now called diploma exams — many students thought their first test a snap.

And Lloyd Symyrozum, director of the education department student evaluation branch, says the essay portion of the English 30 and 33 exam went off without a hitch.

Only four students from an unnamed northern school division came close to missing their opportunity to have their academic performance measured with counterparts in the rest of the province when their school bus wouldn't start.

Symyrozum says a car was sent out to pick up the Grade 12 students who were then allowed to write a little beyond the province-wide 11:30 a.m. deadline to make up for the time lost because of the stalled bus.

Sheryl Bradshaw, a Louis St.Laurent Catholic high school student, says she thought her English 33 essay exam was easy.

"We've been practising (writing essays) for two weeks, maybe even a month," she says.

Schoolmate Sandy Bernard, who wrote the same exam, says the exam, which asked students to describe the ideas in a cartoon, may look easy "but it depends on how they are marked."

The shorter essay questions had students write about what they do to be accepted in life and to prove they have a friend who should have a citizenship award.

In the English 30 test, students were asked to read a poem and a piece of prose and write about them analytically. The other questions asked the students to compare the characters in the two readings to other characters in literature they had studied.

On Jan. 27, students will write a short-answer English exam followed by exams in other subjects. The provincial testing will be completed Jan. 31 with marks announced in March.

Students will continue to get marks from teachers and most post-secondary institutions will consider both classroom and departmental marks for admission.

Jim Kelly, head of the English department at Louis St. Laurent, says some of the sting of the exams has been removed since the University of Alberta announced that for the first year at least, it will accept either the diploma exam mark or the teacher-awarded mark for its entrance requirements.

Lisa Walter, an English 30 student, says she took writing her exam seriously. Fellow students Craig Bronson and Rim Spee said it is unlikely the university will ignore the mark if they are chosing between two students, one of whom has a better diploma exam mark.

Jonathon Klessen, a St. Laurent English 30 student, says the exams will help erase grade inflation, a practice alleged to have gone on in some schools so students appear to have had superior teaching.

Darrin Russo and others said the exams made them take school more seriously. The only problem Russo noted was the length of time the department will take to mark the exams.

Meanwhile, Calgary continuing education officials are complaining that the scheduling of the exams may cause some of their students to lose a day's pay or even their jobs.

They criticized the Education Department for not accommodating students who take courses at night with alternative scheduling.

Larry Fjerwold, program co-ordinator for the Edmonton Public School Board continuing education, says the scheduling "undoubtedly created hardship for some people."

But he adds that writing the exam isn't likely anymore difficult to schedule than a dental appointment.

Symyrozum replied it would be unfair to have different exam writing times since it opens the possibility of students obtaining the exam in advance of writing it.

January 24,1984

Exam results show school deficiencies

By PAUL CASHMAN
and BILL SASS
Journal Staff Writers

Results of Alberta's first province-wide Grade 12 exams in 11 years show there are shortcomings in the school system, says Education Minister Dave King.

"Clearly they (the marks) show inadequacies in the education system," King told reporters Tuesday after diploma exam results were released. About 25,000 students wrote 41,500 exams in seven subjects.

"It's not as good as I think the students can do. It's as good as is accepted in many jurisdictions across North America, but in this province I think we can do better," he said.

Results of three exams — Biology 30, Math 30 and Physics 30 — were boosted 1.9 to 4.7 per cent because students didn't do as well as expected.

And students, whose marks are being mailed this week, got fewer honors marks and more failing grades than Grade 12 students last year, when teachers decided the whole mark.

The average test scores ranged from 63.8 per cent in English 33 to 59.9 per cent in Biology 30. The other exam averages (in percentages) were: English 30 (61.1), Social Studies 30 (62.4), Math 30 (61.8), Chemistry 30 (62.5) and Physics 30 (60.3).

The final mark consists of an average of the exam mark and the teacher-awarded mark, which was slightly higher than exam marks in every subject except English 33.

King stressed the tests don't reflect on the ability of teachers, who mark students on all objectives of a course while exams are limited to material which can be measured by a paper-and-pencil test.

Morris Treasure, an associate director of the Student Evaluation Branch, said field testing was used to set the difficulty of the exams but in physics, math and biology "we were a little optimistic.

"We found that the kids were not as well prepared to answer the questions as we thought they were from our field testing," he said.

Teachers who helped mark the exams recommended marks be raised twice as much as they finally were, he said.

"We don't want to fail a lot of kids. On the other hand, there is no point in saying everything is hunky dory when in fact, in physical science and biology, it really isn't," he said.

The results also show a lower proportion of honors marks were awarded in every subject this year than last.

For example, 23.4 per cent of Physics 30 students got an 80 per cent or better in the 1982-83 school year, while only 13.8 per cent earned an honors mark this year.

At the other end of the scale, more students failed courses this year than last year in all subjects except English 30 and 33. Math 30 proved the toughest subject, with about 1,150 of 7,600 students failing.

King said the first tests will provide a benchmark for the future as the province begins efforts to revamp the structure of the system and shore up weaknesses.

"We're working to improve the quality of the students and we're going to do that by improving the learning that occurs," he said.

But areas of weakness can't be identified until more data — such as that provided by the tests — is gathered, he said.

February 29,1984

Examining exams

Alberta's first province-wide Grade 12 exams in 11 years came through with flying colors. The same cannot be said for our school system.

Exam results released this week highlight shortcomings in the school system, says Education Minister Dave King. It's difficult to argue.

The fact that results of three of the seven exams — Biology 30, Mathematics 30, and Physics 30 — had to be raised to prevent an unusually large number of students from failing is a horrible indictment of education system standards.

Math and physics, especially, are vital in today's world of high technology, but it appears we are not adequately preparing a new generation of Albertans to cope with new, and complex, realities.

It strains the temper to hear that teachers who helped mark math, physics and biology papers recommended that the marks be raised by twice as much as they finally were.

We can only hope that teachers will become more interested in improving teaching standards instead of trying to cover up shortcomings. But don't hold your breath.

The Alberta Teachers' Association (ATA), which eventually supported the exams under intense parent pressure, now says they were a waste of time.

It would be far better, says the ATA, if we used the $4 million spent on holding the exams to hire additional teachers. This nonsense smacks of oppressive self-interest that clashes with the interests of students.

Exams make students work; they concentrate the mind and instil discipline. And that's the way it should be. Ask anyone who was in school before province-wide, comprehensive exams were ditched.

The province has only released average exam scores, which are interesting as far as they go. The next step is to break down those averages to highlight discrepencies within the system. This is the only way we can effectively judge the strengths and weaknesses.

The ATA maintains standards are generally uniform across the province. What better way to prove this point than by asking that the scores be broken down?

"We're working to improve the quality of the students and we're going to do that by improving the learning that occurs," says King. The exams appear to be here to stay.

Good for him.

March 1,1984

Appendix 4

- Excerpts from Interviews -

Excerpts from Transcripts Taken Prior to June 25, 1984

N ...it (diploma exam) eliminates a lot of favoritism that some teachers have for certain students. Usually these students will receive high marks. This way everyone has an equal chance.

G ...diplomas will not ensure that all students will have an equal opportunity to get the same marks. However, they will ensure that all students will be exposed to the same material and topics.

K ...the unit tests are much harder than the regular (teacher) test. How is it possible for people in some board to know what is being taught and how it is taught?

Bd ...you can see how you compare to everyone else with the diploma exam. Also, with all the many teachers teaching in different ways, a test should have their (teacher) input or

else it will tend to confuse the student.

A ...they (diploma exams) are not prepared well enough, the items aren't field tested enough. Some (school) areas do not take the same material and as a result, will not know as much on the test.

K ...after working all semester what if you bomb out in the diploma? What's one test? Some people choke on tests.

N ...if that is the case then you can appeal the mark.

G ...what if you normally do poorly on a test in general?

K,G,B ...50% of the diploma mark is too high.

Bd ...it is very difficult to prepare for one exam that covers work that has taken a teacher 4 or 5 months to cover. Even if you started 1 month before, it is very difficult to prepare for one climatic exam.

B ...you can't prepare for it.

K ...you don't get the teachers' tests back to study from.

Bd ...the unit exams are stupid and we don't ever get to see them again. We wrote one awhile ago and I don't ever remember what was on it.

B ...you don't study for them (unit tests) cause they're too easy.

Bd ...they (diploma exams) are too stiff. Bang we're the test case and it's 50% of your mark. What if it happens to be a stupid exam? It's all over but the crying!

G ...there is alot of pressure on us.

A ...this system of mark computations should be phased out after the tests (diploma exam) have been perfected and there are no mistakes on them.

K,Bd,G ...that (perfecting of the diploma test) will never happen.

G ...alot of people (teachers, parents, students) hate them (diploma exams) and they were really

upset with the raising of (average) marks for university entrance.

Bd ...your future lies in university. There are no jobs.

B ...kids are being used as guinea pigs. If you don't do well here (diploma exams), you can really blow your chances.

K ...they (society) say get an education but they (government) make it almost impossible to get one.

Bd ...poor kids coming into grade 12 next year! They are test cases as well ... This year we have two chances for a final mark but next year they will only have one.

N ...there are too many students back in school and it it too difficult to maintain individualized teaching.

K ...teachers are trying so hard to prepare you for the departmentals that they are not teaching material that is on their own exam.

As a result, you fail the teacher's exam.

Bd ...the departmentals have scared the teachers to death. They (diploma exams) are only being used to ensure that the teachers are teaching.

N ...they (government) should have started this process 5 years ago and built it up gradually ... it's a good practice for university exams.

K ...why do it (practice) in high school? Do it in university if that is what they are for.

N ...but diplomas will learn you how to write and study for exams in university.

Excerpts From Transcripts Taken After June 25, 1984

A ...I didn't like the set-up in the cafeteria. We had to run around the cafeteria and try to find out where we were supposed to sit.

Bd ...the cafeteria provided a more relaxed atmosphere.Even though there were alot of intense people there, I didn't feel it.

K ...being in the cafeteria made you really nervous with all the students and teachers. The classroom would have been better because you would have felt more comfortable.

Bt ...once you started writing it didn't really matter whether you were in the cafeteria or classroom.

A ...it was easier for people to cheat in the cafeteria than in the classroom.

Bt ...there wasn't that much cheating

done because there were alot of teachers roaming around.

Bd ...three guys were copying off me because I had studied. It was so easy to copy in the cafeteria even with the teachers there.

A ...there should be less multiple choice questions used on future departmentals. This would cut down on people cheating.

K ...there were alot of teachers there watching you timing you, saying "Now Go." It felt like a race at the beginning.

G ...they (diploma exams) weren't really that bad though I didn't appreciate the long questions. All of that information and only one or two questions.

N ...it's better to be given too much information than not enough. If you are a keen person you appreciate all of the additional material in the long questions.

Bt ...the multiple choice questions were too easy. They should have used more long answer questions to really test you.

K ...the teacher should have put more emphasis on essay questions and gave us more practice writing them throughout the year.

Bd ...the multiple choice questions were similiar to the ones we had on other tests. But they were worded in such a way that you had to decipher them to answer the quesitons.

N ...the tests (diploma exams) were really good because the government wasn't trying to fail you.

G ...in some of their (government) tests, they really try to fail you.

A ...there were some questions on there that we couldn't have known. But I guess that is to decipher between a 90% student and a 80%. I guess that's fair.

Bd ...the wording (on the test) was in

complex English because they wanted you to understand the material on a Biology 30 level.

K ...most of the work (on the test) we covered. There were a few things I never saw before but they wouldn't affect my mark much.

G ...the questions were pretty well balanced. We did alot of things in class and it was not covered on the departmental.

N ...there weren't many questions on reproduction and it was our major unit.

Bd ...I was completely confident going into the exam I couldn't have prepared any better. I had studied for weeks and I really knew my work.

K ...it was drummed into our heads by the teacher to study everything because the departmentals will be hard. Everyone in my class was surprised at how easy they were.

G ...I didn't really study hard for

them but I found it (departmentals) really good.

A ...the really good students (80's-90's) didn't really mind writing the departmentals because one more test is not going to hurt them. Only the average students minded writing the departmentals.

A ...I didn't prepare for the departmentals very well because I concentrated on the teachers test. I knew I could do better there (on the teacher's test).

Bt ...the departmentals were easy cause the questions were pretty general. The teacher tests would be harder because they cover the specifics.

K ...the departmentals were alot easier than the unit tests which were not fair at all. They (unit tests) caused alot of tension in students.

K ...if we had been given our unit

tests back it would have helped us to better prepare for the departmentals.

A ...everything was left to our imagination about what we didn't know. ...I don't see the point of having tests just for the benefit of the teacher. So the teacher knows what you know but you don't. The system isn't fair at all.

G ...we should have been given our tests back to study from. Cause this way, we never know for certain what we know and don't know.

G ...actually now that I have written them (diploma exams), mandatory is better cause if it's optional everyone gonna figure it's so hard and they're (students) not gonna write it.

N ...as long as they keep the test fair they (diploma exams) should be made mandatory.

Bd ...if you can get into university without writing the departmental

then don't write them. I wouldn't have (written them).

K ...I would advise everyone to write the departmentals because they're easy. I still say you should have the right to decide if you want to write them or not.

A ...I didn't mind writing the tests (diploma exams) because I think they're a good idea. But I think the 50% is still too high.

Bt ...they (diploma exams) were okay but they should be made optional.

Bd ...you know, grade 11's should have some exposure to the departmentals so next year they won't be so tensed and petrified.